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MACHAN TAYLOR

An Interview by Rob Smittix

RRX: First of all, thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. I'm excited about our conversation.

MT: Wonderful. Yeah, me too. Thank you.

RRX: I know very soon we have you coming to Saratoga Springs (SPAC Aug 1st) with Brit Floyd, so that's exciting.

MT: Yeah, that particular show is with Get The Led Out, a Led Zeppelin tribute band. So it's like an oldies rock and roll show.

RRX: I love it though those are all great groups.

MT: Yeah, absolutely, it should be fun.

RRX: I know we don't have a lot of time, so I'd like to just get to the meat and potatoes. I saw that you have a book out and I think that'd be cool to talk about.

MT: The book is called 'Naked Out Loud,' it's a memoir. It was released last December and it's getting some really nice reviews. I'm very pleased. I've been doing a lot of podcasts and interviews, just trying to get the word out there about it.

RRX: So, the memoir... I imagine from your lengthy resume and all of the cool things that you've done over the years...

is that the focus?

MT: Well, honestly, the overview of the story is definitely talking about my career, my music career, my background, where I grew up, and things like that. But... for me, I think the important part of the story is really what was going on underneath the surface of the seemingly very glamorous career that I was having and I did have. But what was really going on for me spiritually, emotionally, personally through a lot of those years that I was touring and working in the business.

RRX: Sure. That makes a lot of sense. People don't know what's going on behind the scenes. You get up there on stage, do your thing and everyone leaves happy.

MT: Well, everybody leaves pretty happy from the show but it's not always happy behind the scenes, you know? That to me is really the important part of the story.

RRX: But telling the story and getting it out there must feel good to get it off your chest, I'd imagine.

MT: Yeah, it was a very cathartic process writing the book. Honestly, I never intended on writing a book.

The book really came out of almost 3

years of journaling and writing stories down, it was almost a therapeutic process. Then I realized at a certain point that I had over 60,000 words written. Then that culminated into the book and I was lucky enough to get a small publishing deal, so they put it out there and it's amazing how it all unfolded. But that was not my original plan.

RRX: Sometimes things just have a way of working themselves out, you know?

MT: Yeah, I feel very grateful that it worked out the way it did.

RRX: I'll tell you what, I'm definitely gonna go ahead and order myself a copy. I've always wanted to write

a book, I've started before but 60,000 words can seem really far away.

MT: Maybe the thing is to pretend like you're not really writing a book, you're just writing. And then maybe you'll find that it'll unfold easier, without putting a lot of pressure on yourself.

RRX: I can definitely respect that. Well, obviously you're on a really cool tour right now and you've done so much over the years... anything in your music career that really stands out for you as a pivotal moment?

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THIS MONTH'S FEATURES



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MT: Definitely when I toured with Pink Floyd in '87, '88, that was a huge and amazing world tour. But the really amazing part of that story is how it's the gift that keeps on giving. Over the years I've gotten so many calls and opportunities to work with, you know? So-called tribute bands and for some reason, I think the number is in the thousands for Pink Floyd tribute bands around the world. They're not all like Brit Floyd, I would say Brit Floyd is the premier number one Pink Floyd tribute band. There are a lot of smaller localized groups that I've worked with like in Italy there are some very good Pink Floyd Tribute bands that I've worked with. I've gotten calls from people all over the world to come and sing with them that have these Pink Floyd tribute bands. So it's kind of funny, it was not something I ever expected but like I said, it's the gift that keeps on giving.

RRX: It sure is. And yeah, definitely Brit Floyd is a top tier tribute band but what I do appreciate about Pink Floyd tributes is that many of them have a very different take on how they do it. There's so many out there as you said. There's the Australian one and we even have a local tribute here in town called Run

Rabbit Run and they've got their own take on it too. Zeppelin's got a lot of tributes as well and KISS is definitely up there. Oh and oh course, The Grateful Dead. I think they're probably the top 4 all time for tribute bands.

MT: Yeah, it's a thing. I don't remember this 20-30 years ago so much. I don't remember seeing so many tribute bands but it seems like it's a trend because a lot of people still love that music but the bands are gone, the original bands are never gonna happen again.

RRX: Definitely, you're right, you can't see the original acts anymore for a lot of these tributes and venues will sell out or come pretty close to it for these acts, there's a big audience and market for it.

MT: It's really amazing. Who knew?

RRX: They've started 90's tribute acts already and I think it could be too soon. I don't see those shows do as well. And many of those bands are still around with exceptions like Nirvana.

MT: Well, Dave Grohl, he's still around and he's still working, so that's kind of an offshoot of Nirvana.

RRX: True, he's probably the biggest

rock star that's official in the entire world right now.

MT: He's really great.

RRX: Anything else you'd like to get out to the world?

MT: This is sort of a two-fold story... working with Brit Floyd, doing shows with them is a wonderful and nostalgic experience for me and the band is so wonderful, really lovely people. It's been fun for me to kind of relive those memories. Next year 2027 to 2028 is going to mark the 40th anniversary of the Delicate Sound of Thunder Tour that I did with the real Floyd. So, the next couple of years are kind of special and there's gonna be some celebratory shows with Brit Floyd and possibly some other stuff.

RRX: Oh, you're gonna be getting a lot of phone calls.

MT: (Laughs) Yes! That's gonna be interesting and I think probably after 2028, that'll be sort of the end of this little hoorah for me. I feel like that's gonna be a really nice time to kind of put that to bed for myself. But the flip side of the story, I hope people will check out my book. It's a very

vulnerable story, it's taken a lot for me to put that book and that story out there because it is so personal. I would love to hear people's thoughts and feedback.

For more on Machan Taylor and links to purchase *Naked Out Loud* visit:
www.machantaylor.com



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- McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC - or a restaurant that's owned by a human being in the kitchen who's cooking and making sure the plates come out beautiful, and there's love in the hand that made the food; that's where I'm going.

RRX: I couldn't agree more; I'm the same way. Well, again, I appreciate you taking the time with me. Was there anything else that you'd like to say to people, to the world, or anything that you just want to get off your chest?

MG: Gosh ... no, not really, other than there's artists out there just a little below the radar who are doing great work and bringing hope to audiences right now in this time of struggle, and that hope can come in a variety of forms, but it comes from being connected. And those connections that happen through art are really valuable always, but right now they're intrinsically important because we're so disconnected.

RRX: Well, couldn't have said any better. Mary, it's been a pleasure talking to you.

MG: Thanks for having me on.

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Marty Wendell



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The Irwins Do NYC

by Jason Irwin

Bon Jovi, Cheap Pizza & Pregnant Mannequins

There are two kinds of people in this world. The first kind carefully researches every detail of a trip, creates spreadsheets, color-codes itineraries, and books reservations a year in advance. That was my wife,

Lisa - before she met me. Now, we just "see what happens." She loves it.

Monday

Our trip officially began on Monday, July 6, with a drive to Poughkeepsie, where we boarded Metro-North for what has become one of my favorite ways to enter New York City. Somewhere along the ride, I did what every responsible traveler does these days—I asked Facebook where we should go while we were in the city. The internet, as always, didn't disappoint. There: a plan. After arriving at Grand Central, we made the walk toward our hotel, but not before making a quick stop in front of the iconic New York Public Library. Naturally, I posed for a picture holding the July issue of Xperience Monthly. You have to represent wherever you go, right? Our home for the next two nights was the Life Hotel, formerly the original headquarters of Life magazine. As someone who digs history, I loved knowing that journalists, photographers, and editors once walked those same halls producing one of the most influential magazines in America.

Once we got settled, we headed over to our first social media suggestion: The Museum of Sex. If you're expecting some wild, over-the-top experience, it's actually much more of an art exhibit than anything else. It was interesting and entertaining. That said ... it could've been just a little "sexier." I'm just saying. Rain rolled into the city for a while, forcing us to retreat back to the hotel. We responded the only way two

exhausted tourists could—we cracked open a couple White Claws, watched "Everybody Loves Raymond," and waited for Mother Nature to cooperate. Eventually, the skies cleared, and we hit the streets again.

We wandered by the Empire State Building. We admired it from the sidewalk but decided against climbing it—not because it's illegal, well ... it is, but mainly because some other couple had literally done that a few days earlier to propose. And now, King Kong has entered the chat. We moved on. Next, Lisa announced she needed to buy a bra. Simple enough. Or so I thought. If you've never wandered through multiple floors of Macy's looking for women's undergarments while pretending you know where you're going, I highly recommend the experience. Somehow, we escaped that labyrinth without becoming permanent residents. After a while, hunger set in, so we ducked into a random diner that was ... fine. It wasn't terrible. Let's call it aggressively average. Our next objective was to find a bar. Unfortunately, nearly every place we visited had transformed into World Cup headquarters. We aren't exactly soccer fanatics, but we found one that wasn't overflowing, grabbed a couple of Coors Lights, and watched a little of Team USA's loss to Belgium. Later, we stopped at a neighborhood bar called Walters, where the bartender confidently informed us that getting pizza after 11 p.m. in New York City was basically impossible. Conveniently, his buddy happened to be selling slices right next door. We bought one. Then, a few hours later, we stumbled across another pizza place selling better stuff for \$1.50 long after this supposed pizza curfew. Congratulations, dude—you got us. We happily devoured our bargain slices back at the hotel before calling it a night.



Tuesday

Tuesday started early because we had a lot of the city to explore. Once again, Facebook was serving as our unofficial travel guide, and one recommendation that kept coming up was The Trailer Park Lounge down in Chelsea. On the way there, we made an important stop for Lisa. Anyone who knows her knows she's fascinated by the story of John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, so naturally she wanted to visit C.O. Bigelow Apothecaries—the historic pharmacy where Carolyn reportedly shopped for headbands. More my style was the legendary Chelsea Hotel. Now there's a building dripping with rock-and-roll history. Bob Dylan. Leonard Cohen. Janis Joplin. Sid and Nancy ... just imagine the untold stories. We looked around. The hotel has certainly become much fancier following its renovation, and while it was beautiful inside, part of me couldn't help imagining what it must have been like during its chaotic rock-and-roll years.

Another stop on Lisa's wish list was the Mind of a Serial Killer exhibit. Yes, my wife is fascinated with serial killers, and I try not to overthink that. The exhibit featured crime scene evidence, personal belongings, investigative material, and enough creepy artifacts to make you double-check every stranger walking past you afterward. Needless to say, it was cool as heck. Finally, we arrived at Trailer Park

Lounge. What a place. Picture a roadside trailer park exploding inside a Manhattan bar, and you've got the general idea. We met an incredibly fun bartender named L.A., admired a 26-year-old pregnant mannequin who somehow managed to chain-smoke cigarettes while apparently surviving on a steady diet of Pabst Blue Ribbon, and laughed our way through one of the most unique spots we've ever visited. We'll be back. Shockingly, while we were enjoying ourselves, a nearby building partially collapsed just a short distance away. Thankfully, everyone was okay. We completely missed that excitement, probably for the best. Ultimately, it was time to head back, clean up, and prepare for the main event. We grabbed a few pre-concert drinks at a bar across from Madison Square Garden before joining thousands of excited fans streaming into one of the world's most famous arenas.

Lisa had never been to Madison Square Garden before, so talk about doing your first visit right. That night, Bon Jovi opened the first of nine sold-out shows, a pretty spectacular launch for their Forever Tour. The significance wasn't lost on anyone. After years away from touring because of Jon Bon Jovi's serious vocal issues and...

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An Interview:

Mary Gauthier

By Rob Smittix

RRX: You recently did some songwriting courses with Richard Thompson. That's interesting because you obviously are a renowned songwriter, and to learn from someone who's been doing it for so long is amazing.

MG: I really love working with songwriters and helping them to have confidence in their own voice, to take some risks, to be vulnerable, to be brave, to put it out there and see what happens. It's one of my great joys to work with adult songwriters who've always had the call to do it but have kinda toggled back and forth between actually doing it and just wanting to do it. I'm super excited to have been invited by Richard to be a part of his songwriting camp this year.

RRX: That's amazing. I'm a songwriter myself, but I'm always down to get some tips. I think one of the things I see nowadays is (and I think you mentioned it before about) ... having your voice. I think there's a lot of very talented musicians, a lot of people that have a lot of great voices. But I still think sometimes, especially with upcoming artists, they're afraid to say what they really need to say. You know what I mean?

MG: I totally know what you mean, and that's where I come in. When I say voice, I don't mean singing voice. I mean writer's voice. How do you sound like you? How do I sit down and write a song that sounds like a Mary Gauthier song? I've learned over the years how to teach that ... not how to sound like a Mary Gauthier song but how to sound like yourself. It almost always involves taking a risk and saying something that's a little scary to say and saying something that really matters to you. Putting some skin in the game, that's gonna do it. Like you said, there's a risk to that because we live in a cancel culture. We live in a world where people's comments are immediate, knee-jerk, and often unkind, and so it's scary. But the rewards outweigh the risks. There's a service element to it. I

think it's a very valuable and useful thing to do the thing that's hard.

RRX: That's right, and you know what? You can't satisfy everyone, but being true to yourself certainly is a satisfaction in itself.

MG: Yeah, the only person that needs to be proud of your song is you.

RRX: That's right. Now you've been doing it obviously a long time, but how long has it actually been? Like when did you really get started and start performing and everything?

MG: I'd say 1995, 1996, something like that, which for most artists comparatively, I got started pretty late. I started writing songs when I was 35. I had been in the restaurant business prior to that. I went to chef school. I was in the culinary arts and loved it, but then I became really passionate about songwriting, and the culinary arts just didn't compare for me. I liked being on stage with the song, telling the story more than I liked being in the kitchen cooking jambalaya. And so I enjoyed the transition around my mid-30s and came to Nashville when I was 40 to do this full-time, full-on.

RRX: So you're right, you actually did get kind of a late start, but it seemed to work out for you, and I'm sure in your own kitchen, you're probably still a mean chef.

MG: Well, honestly, kinda, but you know? I don't have the time, I'm not home enough, and I don't have the ingredients. I mean, I'm home for a week here, and I'll do one good dinner, but I'm not the maestro I used to be in the kitchen because I got rusty. You gotta do it to keep it alive, and I'm better at booking flights, hotels, rental cars, getting on the highway, playing and singing songs than I am cooking these days, for sure.

RRX: Well, that's a whole lifestyle right there. I've made this joke many times, but when anyone ever becomes



Grammy nominated or a Grammy winner, that becomes your first name in everybody's article. Never in mine, though, but Grammy-nominated is something that they've described you as for how long?

MG: 2018, and it's an honor, you know? I think there is a legitimacy that comes with being Grammy nominated because you're voted on by your peers. That is something that has great value to nominees. Once you reach a stage of fame with household namedness, the Grammys don't really matter so much anymore because you've already been legitimized, but in the smaller categories it's huge. I would call it an energetic boost. The smaller categories aren't on TV, and you don't get to perform. It's like two award shows; there's one during the day, and there's one on TV. I was in the category for best contemporary folk record of the year. So it's the smaller category, not on TV, but it was a wild ride and man, I enjoyed it!

RRX: Absolutely, I know several musicians with the same deal, nominated for a category that wouldn't

be on TV. I'm over here thinking ... these are the categories I'd actually wanna see because I'm not into the mainstream.

MG: Honestly, I'm not either. I like the outsider art, the stuff that's not fundamentally commercial in nature but is fundamentally art. To me, that means it says something that creates an emotional connection with the listener that oftentimes can even be disturbing, but useful in a way that has deep value. That's what art is, and commerce is different. Commerce is all about units sold. If I had a choice between a commercial restaurant, let's say...

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THE RECORD FILE

By Tony Mastrianni

THE ALARM'S "TRANSFORMATION": A Great New Album With a Very Sad Storyline.



Band leader of The Alarm, Mike Peters, passed away last year, following a 31-year battle with cancer. His monumental legacy continues with the release of the band's "TRANSFORMATION" on Twenty First Century Recordings. From the opening call to arms "New Life," The Alarm roars vibrantly to life. Originally intended as an optimistic song to herald the triumph over cancer to be released after he had beaten cancer successfully again, it instead carries a new sort of poignant breath as he sings "I'll see you in the new life." The classic ringing guitar progressions that made The Alarm famous in the '80s punctuate "Outlier" with Mike's vocals showing no signs of wear. The anthemic and earnest "One in a Million" kicks off as an infectious hymn with the lyrics "one life, one heart, one soul" before counting down to a fiery chorus. It's a fist-up outcry, the kind that the band built their initial acclaim with and made fans out of U2, Simple Minds, The Cult, among many other legendary rock bands. The closing ballad "Love Makes Love" ends the album with a self-reflecting note, the warmth of Mike's voice acting as a final embrace.

More about Mike Peters: He first rose to prominence in the early 1980s with The Alarm, whose powerful anthems

like "68 Guns" and "Strength" helped define a generation of alternative rock. Known for their empowering anthems and heartfelt lyrics, the band was adored by their devoted international following, with Peters' raw vocals and commanding stage presence at the heart of it all. During a music career that spanned five decades, Peters performed with some of music's greatest artists and bands, including Bob Dylan, Neil Young and U2. Diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia, Peters refused to let his illness silence him. While this may seem like the final chapter for The Alarm, "Transformation" promises that the legacy of The Alarm will transform into something larger. The Alarm are arguably one of the most underappreciated critically acclaimed rock bands I can think of.

Get ready for V TORRES. She's a Los Angeles-based singer, songwriter, and musician whose sound is rooted in a unique range that blends indie-rock, funky beach Americana, and stripped-down, vocal-heavy ballads.

Expansive, free, all out— V TORRES' musical expression rides the power of the journey, delves into the gratitude of becoming, and leans into the fluidity of desire and intuition. Taking the driver's seat, co-producing her sophomore album, "Woman" (which will be released shortly), her latitude in creative direction has led to a seemingly personal project that oozes vulnerability and sheer grit that's energetically accented with her unique vibrant style.

Born and raised in the coastal suburbs of Southern California, V TORRES grew up listening to the deep cuts of her parents' record collection. Heavily loaded with her dad's predisposition towards psychedelic bands such as Pink Floyd, The Moody Blues, and outlaw country like Hank Williams Jr., her influence was balanced out with her mom's collection of singer/songwriters

like legend Joni Mitchell, the rock of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, and the disco funk of The Bee Gees and Earth Wind and Fire. And while neither of her parents were musicians themselves, their love of music was infectious. Inspired, V got her first electric guitar when she was eleven years old and started taking lessons. By the time she was in high school, she was playing her own music at local open mics. By college, she was booked at famous ticketed LA venues like The Roxy and The Viper Room with her first band, Gorgeous Got a Gun. Her first EP, "Real Life Love," was released in 2017, and in the years following, she recorded and dropped single after single, notably "Best of It," "Golden Hour," and "The Comedown."

With her latest record completed (I was privy to hear a preview digital demo disc), V TORRES has stayed true to her roots, but her sound has emerged into something more. The intentional down-shift into the making of this album allowed for intuition to take the lead, and the result is a sonically amplified, lyrically unguarded, raw and unadulterated record. With a heart wide open, themes of love and grief are woven throughout the record. Definitely an impressive new record album. Well worth the wait!

For more than four decades, Osaka, Japan's legendary pop-punk trio Shonen Knife have remained one of the most beloved and influential underground rock bands in the hemisphere. Formed in the 1980s by sisters Naoko and Atsuko, the band built an international cult following through their ear candy mix of punk rock energy, sugary pop melodies, and lyrics celebrating everyday joys like candy, animals, food, and fun. Inspired equally by '60s girl groups and classic punk rock, Shonen Knife created a sound entirely their own — bright, joyful, loud, and often irresistibly arresting.

Over the years, the band earned admiration from artists including Nirvana, Sonic Youth, and Redd Kross. Kurt Cobain famously championed Shonen Knife in the early 1990s, helping introduce them to a massive international audience during the alternative rock



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2.. 3.. 4.. - Brother, Can You Spare Ten Trillion Dimes?

By Chris Busone

How many zeros in a trillion? The short answer is, a lot. The longer-winded, more comprehensive answer is that a trillion is made up of one thousand billions, each of which is comprised of nine zeros. So by the accepted, standard, short-scale numeric system used by the majority of the world, one trillion of anything is accompanied by twelve, count 'em, twelve zeros. Normally, to see that many zeros, one has to buy a ticket to a Kid Rock concert.

But when it is referred to in a monetary sense ... money, moolah, cash-dollars, coinage, cheddar ... a trillion can only be quantified in fiduciary terms (and I believe I'm quoting Warren Buffett here) as a Butt-Load. Coincidentally, that's a strikingly accurate description of the one and only person on the planet who has that kind of scratch on hand. But we'll get back to him. Let's first hear some thoughts from people of note throughout the ages on money and its worth.

Pablo Picasso paints a pretty picture: "I'd like to live like a poor man, only with lots of money."

Famous money-grubbing oil baron J. Paul Getty says: "The meek shall inherit the earth. But not the mineral rights."

And, never a bridesmaid and always a bride, Elizabeth Taylor muses: "Money is the best deodorant."

Liz's quote hits just right because she's not so subtly hinting at the fact that no matter how much of a tool you are, if you've got it where it counts - your bank statement - you can pretty much get out of any jam, brush off any dirt, and bag the object of your desire. Or several of them as it turns out. The rest of us have to rely on charm, wit, and groveling.

Let us take, for example, the individual who has been identified as the world's first trillionaire, and conjure up a picture

of him in our head. Now, luckily for guys like me, physical appearance isn't the overriding factor in attracting the person of your dreams. But this doughy disaster of a specimen who is totally devoid of compassion, of caring for his fellow humans, or of anything else resembling a moral compass, has somehow fathered 14 children by four different women.

So, it's only natural we ask ourselves, how does this walking papercut have so many romantic liaisons with significant individuals like an avant-garde musician, a venture capitalist/tech executive, an author, and a political commentator?

Well, let's see; he's a soulless douche ... and he's stinkin' rich. Guess which one matters.

But let's shift our weight for a moment. I, for one, have no issues with the acquisition of riches or those who acquire them. I am a huge fan of capitalism ...YAY MONEY! I honestly believe that everyone has the right to make, spend, squirrel away, or fold into paper airplanes as much cash as they care to amass. And you should be able to spend it on anything you want without fear of reprisals.

Say, for instance, you want to spend it on ... oh I don't know ... a d**k-shaped rocket. Go ahead! It's your money. But if you're spending billions on d**k-shaped rockets while not spending jacksh** on children starving all over the world, then sorry, Chauncey, you're a bigger d**k than any rocket your billions could ever buy you. Christ, when I first started working a 9-5 job, I was making \$237 every two weeks, and I still had \$5 taken out of every check by NYS SEFA and donated to St. Jude's. That doesn't make me a saint, just a person.

All kidding aside, all I'm saying is ... just do the right thing, you rich weirdos. Oh, and maybe pay some taxes sometimes.

That said, and philanthropy notwithstanding, it is my firm belief that you earned it and you can spend it on anything you desire. With one notable exception.

You should not buy yourself a world leader. It is absolutely not cool to go strolling through the aisles of Greedy Fu**s-R-Us and pick out a megalomaniac with a "For Sale" sign hung around his neck. "Oh, look honey, they have them in orange!"

No, when you start pulling crap like that, We the People have to stand up and make enough noise that those guys you paid and got elected get nervous, no matter how much you secretly funneled into their campaign and personal accounts. And we keep making that noise until we get you kicked out of your phony baloney government job they gifted you, which then causes you and your latest acquisition to have a lover's spat in front of the entire world and all of us to tell you that your truck looks like a fingerprint-magnet/high-end-dumpster.

But other than that, spend, spend, spend, you crazy Richie Riches. Go get yourself that gold-plated enema bulb, the coveted Yodeling Pickle (an actual motion-activated plastic pickle that emits a high pitched yodel when least expected), the Elephant Man's squash racket, Napoleon's penis (yup, for reals, it exists in a jar somewhere), some two-headed ducks, an alien in a jar (all real, check Etsy), and a bag of Reindeer Farts for the kids (It's just cotton candy but the little buggers can't get enough around holidays).

Yes, if you truly believe that wealth and all the goodies it buys are the secret to a happy life, then make it rain dolla-



dolla bills and have a ball. I myself have always followed the teaching of Marx - Groucho that is - and his philosophy that, **"The secret to life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that, you've got it made."**

So while I begrudge no one their shot at their own particular monetary wet dream, I would hope we can all do what we can, with what we have, for those who can't.

And if you can't see your way clear to pitch in, Chauncey, even with all your billions and trillions, while I wish you no ill will, I do hope you mistake your Yodeling Pickle for your gold-plated enema bulb, and it gets stuck, and every time you sit down, your ass sounds like one of those lederhosen-wearing dudes in the Alps. Here I'll even count it off for you

...2...3...4...YO-Da-Lay-EE-Hoo...!\$\$\$

An Interview

A Visit to “Vintage Athens” with Armistead Wellford

by Tara D

Most of our readers and RadioRadioX listeners are familiar with some of the bands that were originators of the wildly creative music scene that was Athens, Georgia in the '80s, such as the B-52s and R.E.M. But how many of you have heard of Pylon, the Side Effects, or Love Tractor?

Recently, Kaleidoscope host Jim Barrett and I had the pleasure of spending a lovely summer afternoon in conversation with Armistead Wellford of Love Tractor, learning more about the musical crucible that was Athens in the early '80s. Armistead, who was in town working as a carriage driver for “The Gilded Age” production, hails from Richmond, Virginia, but a large part of his heart will clearly always belong to Athens and the scene he created there with friends and fellow bandmates.

Wellford arrived at UGA (University of Georgia) Art School to study Graphic Design in 1978 with the intent of going into cartooning or animation. He cites his favorite artists as Rembrandt, R. Crumb, and Max Fleischer. We sat down with Armistead and his “cousin-in-law,” filmmaker James Rasin, to continue a conversation that began in the River Street Beat Shop the last time “The Gilded Age” was in town to learn more of the backstory of '80s Athens, and were rewarded with a rock and roll history lesson and so much more.

Wellford shared anecdotes of happy memories and lasting close friendships with many of the other musicians and creative co-conspirators such as Jerry Ayers (who had much more than his share of 15 minutes of fame – including penning the lyrics for the B-52s’ “52 Girls”), people who were integral to the development of the fertile Athens scene. Seeing the B-52s take Saturday Night Live by storm in January 1980 inspired others around them to form or put renewed effort into their own bands. Armistead played bass, as well as guitar and clarinet, for Love Tractor, a band known for their largely instrumental songs, unusual for pop music at the time. “I’m afraid of lyrics,” he laughs.

When asked if there was a common thread between bands that seem worlds apart sonically, such as R.E.M. and Pylon, he noted that there was some competition among the bands, which may have contributed to each of them developing their own unique sound. Still, he remembers, “we all wanted to make each other proud.” It strikes me that another common thread was the sheer danceability of much of the music, whether it was the freaky punk frolic that was the B-52s, the angular, disjointed urgency of Pylon, or the rhythmic, rollicking romp of Love Tractor. Armistead remembers he was told, “Your job as a bass player is important, to keep the dancers on the dance floor.”

The scene he describes of those days is of young people spending their waking hours almost entirely on creating – attending art school during the day, writing music at night, performing on the weekends, and creating their own style with vintage clothing and accessories procured from Potter’s House, “the go-to place for hipster fashion.” They sought out locations to host touring bands such as the Cramps or Gang of Four, as there weren’t yet venues for the bands to play. One of these spaces was a friend’s painting studio (belonging to Pylon drummer Curtis Crowe) that became an early version of the now legendary 40 Watt Club (eventually to become a proper club in a building across the street), so named because of the 40-watt lightbulb hanging in the studio. He described Athens as a “small town with a SoHo feeling,” where “all the buildings were empty.”

“Oh,” he adds with a roguish grin, “and we had a lot of sex.”

A musician from a young age, Wellford started playing violin at age 5 and studied the Suzuki method, and even met Suzuki himself a couple of years later on a school trip. His father, also a musician, began teaching him to play guitar at age 7. A talented multi-instrumentalist, Armistead plays guitar,

bass, clarinet, and piano largely by ear in addition to writing music. He notes that although he came from a family of “great literary minds,” he has always been a musician. In Athens, while attending art school where he became friends with classmate Michael Stipe, he was writing and performing music with Love Tractor, who eventually toured with New Order, the Psychedelic Furs, 10,000 Maniacs, and opened for the B-52s at Radio City Music Hall. Dave Schools of Widespread Panic is a friend and cites Love Tractor as an influence, as evidenced by their song “Love Tractor.” The Love Tractor song “Fun to Be Happy” has been frequently covered by the Feelies.

Love Tractor reissued two of their six albums in 2022 and 2023 (a good place to start is their album “Around the Bend”) with plans to revisit others, but typical band differences prevented them from completing that project. In the meantime, he toured the Gutterball album “Weasel” (a side project of Steve Wynn of The Dream Syndicate) and started writing and recording his own new material under the moniker “Armi and Friends,” eventually settling on the name “Armistead’s Armi.” We were treated to a preview of a few unreleased demos and are looking forward to them seeing a proper release. These songs, rhythmic and funky, yet full of shimmering touches, feature delicate nuances (such as the addition of harp and strings) and deliberate musical references, as in the song “Start,” which integrates the melody of the starting horn for a horse carriage into the mix. Check out the single, “Turbulence of Love,” on Spotify (featuring/produced by Bill Berry with lyrics by Fred Schneider).

Due to his lifelong love of and expertise with horses, he became a carriage driver, which has resulted in him being involved in the series “Lincoln” and “The Gilded Age,” among others. In “The Gilded Age,” Wellford plays the role of coachman to Bertha Russell (Carrie Coon), and he describes the

sensitivity required to drive a carriage as being similar to playing music. Truly a Renaissance man (in addition to being a musician, composer, and actor, he is a painter with an interest in historical renovation), when asked how he balances all of these different creative endeavors, he simply replied, “They all work together.”

Armistead shared a recent encounter with a staff member of “The Gilded Age” shoot, Patrick, who, upon getting deeper in conversation in a moment of kismet, turned out to be none other than the son of Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, whom Armistead has long admired. Coincidentally(?) he had just purchased a Byrds album at the Beat Shop, a record store that reminds him of Wuxtry Records in Athens – still in business today. Troy has always been a magical place for me, a place where it seems like anything can happen, and I know there are others who feel the same way. For many, having “The Gilded Age” film in our small town is a kind of recognition of some of the aspects that make it so special. I’ve enjoyed many magical moments at the Beat Shop, and this connection with Armistead was one of them.

Enjoy Troy, and watch this space for updates from Armistead’s Armi!





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Continued from Page 7...

lengthy recovery, there was genuine emotion in the building before the first song even started. He sounded remarkably good. No, he's not twenty-five anymore, but then again, none of us are (well, unless you are). Twenty thousand fans gladly handled plenty of backing vocals anyway. Considering everything he's battled through medically, his performance was impressive, heartfelt, and filled with gratitude, and you could tell he appreciated every single person in that arena. It wasn't perfect. It didn't need to be. It was authentic. And it was fun. The set balanced classic hits with newer material, giving longtime fans exactly what they came to hear while reminding everyone that the band still has something left in the tank. Drummer Tico Torres and the keyboardist with the hair that looks like Ramen Noodles are the only classic lineup members left besides Jon, but his "new" band lineup was still pretty great. Phil X handled the impossible task of replacing Richie Sambora on guitar. There were definitely moments when you couldn't help but imagine how much bigger those harmonies and guitar parts would've sounded with Richie there. Maybe someday.

After the show, we wandered around, doing some more bar hopping. We ended up in a spot called Malone's. There we met a friendly gentleman who bought us a round. He was very generous. Also ... very serial killer-ish. Perhaps we'd spent too much time at that exhibit earlier in the day, but the dude was giving us some major freaky vibes. We thanked him, finished our drinks, returned safely to the hotel, cracked open a couple more cold ones, and celebrated another successful day alive.

Wednesday

By Wednesday morning, we were definitely feeling the effects of walking what seemed like forty-seven miles over two days. And probably the effects of other things as well. The biggest victory? We actually woke up in time for checkout. Before heading home, we crossed the street to Pershing Square, our traditional Grand Central breakfast stop. Normally, this is where mimosas enter the story. This time it was straight juice, breakfast, and responsible adult behavior - at least for one morning. With some time to spare before our train, we stepped inside the New York Public Library. That deserved far more than the abbreviated visit we gave it, but even a quick walk-through reminded us why it's one of the city's great landmarks. From there, we wandered into Bryant Park, grabbed a seat and did one of New York's greatest free activities: people-watching. Nothing too exciting, but there was also a robot lawn mower hard at work, and I don't know why we found that so fascinating - but it was.

Overall, we were pleased. We got lost in Macy's, visited a sex museum, explored the minds of serial killers, walked through rock-and-roll history, found our new favorite dive bar, ate late-night \$1.50 pizza, and saw Bon Jovi play Madison Square Garden. Somehow, we also managed to avoid losing any belongings (which I am famous for) and getting arrested (which I was formerly famous for), or ending up in a fight over Phil Collins (which my wife is famous for). I'd call that a successful vacation. So thank you, New York. The Irwins had an absolute blast. We hope you'll let us back in.



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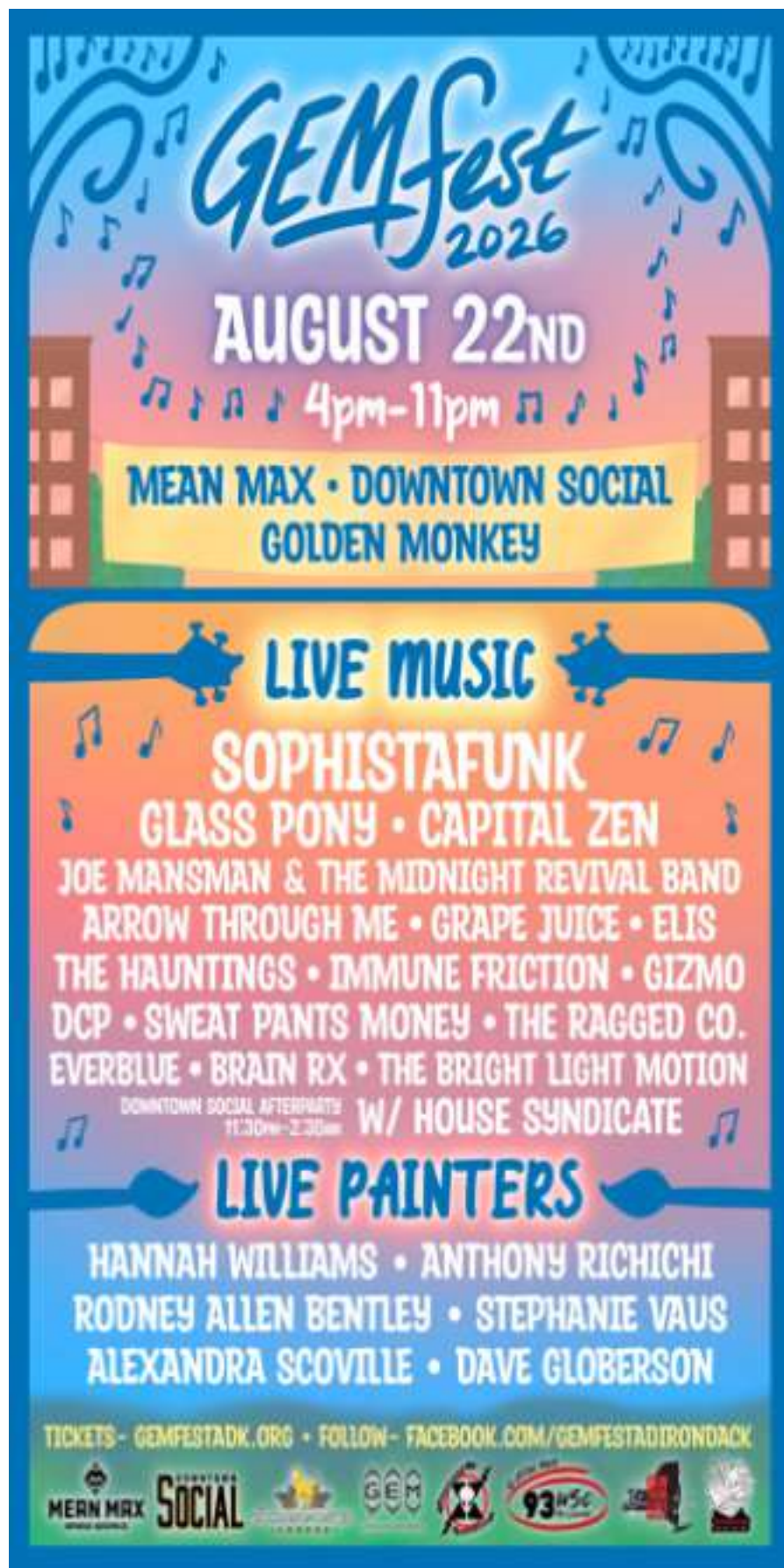
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3 Questions with Eric Ambel *By Rob Skane*

Eric Ambel plays rocknroll guitar - loose, raw, and loud - and he's worked with everyone from Joan Jett to Steve Earle. You'd be wise to listen to his work as a musician but also as a record producer. If I were you, I'd track him down and have him produce your next LP.

Please find him at www.ericambel.com or www.cowboytechnicalservices.com

RRX: What was the moment that made you pick up a guitar and never put it down?

EA: The Beatles on Ed Sullivan. I was doing my homework in my room, and my parents yelled out, "Hey, you gotta see this." They were on the couch laughing. I was not laughing. I didn't have a guitar yet, but I was gonna get one no matter what. My first guitar was a folk guitar I got from a neighbor for 25 bucks. It played awfully, but I got one of those chord books and started teaching myself. I had already been

playing piano and the trumpet. The first song I learned was "The House of the Rising Sun," and it was a good one. It had five chords.

RRX: If you could go back and tell your younger self one thing about playing guitar, what would you say?

EA: I'd tell myself not to underestimate the thrill of playing the thing. I did know that as a kid, but I like to remind myself every once in a while.

RRX: When you're not onstage or recording, what kind of stuff do you play when no one's listening?

EA: A friend of mine who was a writer for an esteemed hi-fi magazine got to interview Les Paul about his home stereo. The interview was long and technical. At the very end, my friend asked Les Paul if he had a tip for the guitar players. Les said, "Yeah, don't keep the guitar in the case." This writer

didn't play guitar, and Les could see that he was kind of baffled by this statement, so Les helped him out and finished, "You can't play it in the case."

I leave guitars around. I like to pick them up and see what comes out of them. If I like it, I'll record the bit on the phone. Every few months I'll go through the phone and see if something's better than good; then I'll work on that a little more. If I'm not doing that, I might try to figure out how to play a Beatles piano song on the guitar. That's always a worthy challenge.



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Continued from Page 45...

have a wider audience that you can move around within ... that's my goal. And also, I love to travel. So I like to play music wherever I travel, whether that's open mics or getting gigs or things like that. So, not really organized tours, but, you know, I spend every August in Northern California. I often go to Ireland or Scotland in the spring, and just being able to do more music when I'm in those places. So, I'm looking to do that.

RRX: That sounds wonderful. So, you mentioned how you became involved with WAMM. What are you most excited about for this year's WAMM festival? What are some things that you're really psyched to do or people you're psyched to meet?

BW: Well, I just want to be a part of promoting women in music because - having spent a lifetime of being not just a singer, but a guitar player and at times a drummer- the music field has not been easy. Women musicians are getting more up front. They're getting more support, they're getting stronger, they're getting more airplay. But there are still a lot of hurdles. Women have travelled all the way to Michigan to be in a music space that's dominated by men ... they shouldn't have to travel so far, you know?

Continued from Page 47...

guy in the band goes, oh, you should do Vinnie Vincent, he's like, I love Vinnie Vincent. So then \$1,200 later, I bought him a costume.

RRX: Wow, that's not cheap at all.

VD: He did a great job. He did his first gig at the Strand, and the second gig he did up in Ticonderoga, the festival they have every year.

RRX: Next door to where we are in Cohoes at the music hall, pretty recently ... I forget the wrestler guy's name, but he has his Kiss tribute, and they played.

VD: Jericho.

RRX: Chris Jericho, yeah. Jericho himself, he's a name; he's gonna bring people out on name alone, but personally, if I'm gonna see a Kiss tribute, I want everybody wearing the getup.

VD: Right! We went that route one time. We tried to do the unmasked thing when we did a lot of the '80s and '90s s**t; it just didn't sell, because every time you called somebody to try to book it, they're like, oh, you guys got the makeup and everything? And you gotta tell them no, they don't want nothing to do with it.

RRX: Yeah, I agree with that.

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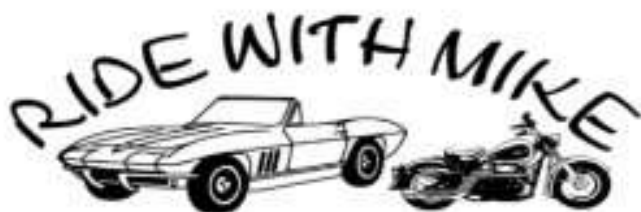
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An Interview:

The Protest Kid Returns

by Sara Busone

G. Love and his chickens treat Sara Busone to a sneak peek of a new song, discuss the “Lemonade” anniversary tour coming to UPH in August, and the release of “Ode to RL”

RRX: Have you played this area before, the capital region of New York?

G: I went to Skidmore (College) and...actually, it was a pretty informative place for me. I really was getting my thing together there and I was a regular performer at Café Lena's in Saratoga Springs there for the open mic nights, and also at Falstaffs, the coffee shop on campus at Skidmore... that's kind of where I (was) really getting my things going. So yeah, it'd be great to be back there. And I know that there's a huge live music community there.

RRX: I was just listening to “Ode to RL”. Tell me a little bit about the blending of the hill country blues with modern grooves and sampling and where the inspiration for all that came from.

G: So, during COVID, I reached (out)to my friend Luther Dickinson from the North Mississippi All-Stars, and they have their father's studio, the Zebra Ranch studio in Coldwater, Mississippi...so, I moved there and we went down to Cold Water, Mississippi during COVID to record there. And because everybody was on the road it kind of became like a little summit, a hill country summit, and a lot of artists came through. One of those artists was RL Boyce... he passed a couple of years back, but he was kind of (an) elder of the hill country, and we had this amazing night. For me, it was one of the greatest nights of just music and my journey...I mean it was great; he was the best and we drank some whiskey and played some blues all night and I backed him up on the harmonica... That night we traded hats and we went on our way... I had started working with this younger producer named Logan Tickner in Orleans, Massachusetts, where I lived in college, and he made beats... I was like, “Man, see if you can pop up this and sample some of RL's voice, the harmonic guitars and everything, then we can make something out of them!” And it was so infectious that every groove he gave me, I went to the booth right away and was just able to come up with lyrics... recorded over these beats. They're all voices, vocals, snippets of his guitar, snippets of my harmonic, snippets of Luther either on piano and this guy Cody Harrell on slide guitar and Luther on slide, Chuck Treece on bass and drums. I was pretty amazed how it came out and I just can't get enough

of that record... it's been out for about a year now and I just listen to it all the time. I love it.

RRX: I also read that you said you lost thousands of your fans due to your politics. You said, “it's the duty of artists and always has been to represent the people.” I wanted to ask you if this has continued to be something of an issue for you between you and your fans, and how you handle that delicate issue.

G: I don't know... I kind of to try to step back from it recently but look - I write songs about all kinds of stuff... this country is extremely divided and tribal, and certainly have lost a lot of fans that don't agree with my politics and I do notice that online... it's an easy thing to say to artists, “we like your music, we don't like your politics” or “stick to entertaining”... I think as artists we do have an opportunity and perhaps a responsibility to speak for the society... people... that we believe in and that we represent, and the, communities and everything, and I certainly feel that way, and my mission has always been to spread love, and just to inspire people to play music. I used to say on my Instagram, “saving the world one show at a time”. I was trying to spread a good vibe. And my shows, anybody's welcome at my shows, but I will say that... I don't tend to preach at my shows or talk politics at the shows, but a lot of my songs have intonations or just are commentary on... politics or racism or social injustices or anything like that or, how I would see a better vision for the world. I've always been a protest kid. There's another song I'm working on that I wrote recently called “Reciprocity”, and one of the lyrics from that was like, “you'll never be able to see what another person sees, but you should try to understand them with empathy, and then if you can understand”-, let me just pull up this lyric because I think you'll dig it. Hold on.

RRX: Sure, thank you, I'll get a little sneak peek. An exclusive!

G: (distant clucking) You hear my chickens in the background?

RRX: (laughs)Oh...you have chickens!

G: Here we go... “we will never be able to see what another person sees/but we could try to understand



Photo By: Joe Navas

them with empathy/we empathize with someone's opinion and the way they look at life/even though we don't agree and we don't think it's right/and how can we feel we're so right when someone else thinks we're so wrong/this is basic human nature/and the story goes on/people are shaped by the society that raised them/and the culture they know is what made them/if you can understand that/we don't have far to go as we travel together down this common road/we can find respect for their perspective/mutual understanding leads us to a safe landing” ... so, in that sense, most people are shaped by how they were raised and there's some people that break from their parents' politics, a lot of people, but some people don't, and so... this is cultural stuff and I guess that's it.

Continued on page 34...

Continued from Page 52...

PM: If you look at the setlist and you read the book ... If you took out the covers that they threw in like "If 6 Was 9," and a couple other songs, you'd be like ... yeah, this is entirely the book. The band didn't confirm it, and I don't wanna hear yes or no either way, but it's kind of obvious because they have copies of it.

RRX: That's right. Now, you said that the new book that you're working on based on Widespread Panic ... you mentioned that it's gonna be the first of a series of three. What are the other books in that series of 3 going to be about?

PM: The first one's "The Widespread Alphabet.' The second one is gonna be ... I don't have the title for it yet, but it's gonna be a Billy Strings-centric story that also has the alphabet, but it's gonna have an added aspect to it where we follow the hero's journey, which is a literary style, you know? Pretty much like any Harry Potter or Percy Jackson hero's journey; it's cool. I actually learned it from a teacher in Green Island, and so I'm having that Billy Strings story follow that because it'll create a deeper story for kids and more than just at learning-the-alphabet ages. The third book is gonna be Grateful Dead geography.

RRX: Well, they've been everywhere.

PM: I am very excited to see how that all unfolds. We got a lot of the pieces of that already done, and we're just looking to do the next step.

RRX: I love all of it! Anytime we can intermingle good music with education for kids, I'm all about it.

PM: If anyone wants to pick up the current books, they can get them at my Etsy store, <https://www.etsy.com/shop/phanart>



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One Last Encore *by Vito Ciccarelli*

After 23 unforgettable years, the time has come for me to take my final bow as the Producer of the Powers Park Concert Series. While it isn't easy to say goodbye to something that has been such a meaningful part of my life, I leave with a heart full of gratitude and memories that will last forever. When the first concert took the stage more than two decades ago, I never imagined what this series would become. My hope was simple—to create a place where families, friends, and neighbors could gather on warm summer evenings to enjoy great music, share a few laughs, and build a stronger sense of community. Thanks to all of you, that dream became a tradition. Over the years, I've watched children dance in front of the stage who are now bringing their own children to Powers Park. I've seen countless lawn chairs unfold, picnic baskets open, and friendships grow between people who may never have met if not for a Saturday evening concert. Those moments have always meant far more to me than any attendance number or applause. They are what made this series special.

No one accomplishes something like this alone, and I have been blessed to work alongside so many wonderful people throughout the years. I want to extend my deepest appreciation to Councilman Mark Wojcik, Councilman James Gordon, and Councilman James Gulli. They worked side by side with me through countless concerts, planning meetings, unexpected challenges, and many memorable successes. Their dedication, friendship, and commitment to our community helped make this series everything it became. I also want to sincerely thank Mayor Harry Tutunjian and Deputy Mayor Dan Crawley for their unwavering support and for believing in the concert series. Their confidence in the vision allowed us to continue growing and providing quality entertainment for our community year after year. Their encouragement meant more than they probably realize. To volunteers like John Rustin & others who gave up an evening, every sponsor & radio station who believed in what we were doing, every city employee who helped behind the scenes, my sound technician, Rocco Mazarello, who made

the music come alive, every vendor, and every musician who graced our stage—thank you. Your efforts created something much bigger than a concert series. Together, we built a community tradition. And to the thousands of people who attended over the years, thank you for making every concert worthwhile. Whether you came once or attended every summer, you became part of the Powers Park family. Your smiles, applause, dancing, and support are the soundtrack I'll remember long after the final note has faded.

Although my role with the concert series is ending, my love for Powers Park and this community certainly is not. I'll still be there on occasion, only this time you'll find me sitting in a lawn chair instead of running around behind the scenes. I'll finally get to enjoy the concerts the way so many of you have for years. Life is made up of seasons, and after 23 incredible summers, this one has reached its final encore. While it's difficult to turn the page, I do so knowing that together we created something meaningful—something that brought people together, celebrated local talent, and reminded us that music has a remarkable way of uniting a community.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for allowing me to be part of your summers for the past 23 years. It has truly been one of the greatest honors of my life.

As I leave the stage, I do so with immense gratitude, countless cherished memories, and one simple wish: may the music at Powers Park continue to play for generations to come.

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An Interview:

It's Never Been So Right

by Sara Busone

Mel Guarino from The Bluebillies talks with Sara Busone about WAMM, past and future projects, and their "third tone."

RRX: So how did you come to be involved with WAMM (Women Are Making Music)? Did Nikki Lee reach out to you?

MG: I introduced myself to her when I was at the first WAMM Festival. I was really excited about the whole WAMM concept and the way she was organizing everything ... so I gave her a CD that I had produced in 2016, which was a CD of all women singers from the Lower Adirondack area called "Adirondack Angels - Legacy." I really felt alone ... I felt that being a woman musician around in the area, there was hardly any other women at any of the events that I was going to play, you know ... to jams or anything like that. So, I decided ... knowing the women that I did know and how wonderful they are ... I got a grant from LA to produce a CD of these women singers. So, that was great. It was a great event, and that came out in 2016. And so, I gave that to her ... just to show her that, you know, I'm on board with this. I've been on board with this for a long time and ... even my mother, who was a musician all of her life, she had an awful time. Can you imagine, you know, the '50s and the '60s being a woman musician, a solo artist? It was very tough.

RRX: Well, that is a perfect segue to another question I had! Your band carries a deep family history. Your mom was part of an annual old-time gospel revue, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to that.

MG: Oh yes. So my mother was the youngest of six children, and my grandfather, her father, started a family band called the Bathurst Family Singers, and everybody was in it ... Dad and Mom and the six kids, my mom being the youngest. She was 5 when she started

singing with the band, and they sang all of the old favorites like, "Every Time I Come To Town You Gotta Stop Kicking My Dog Around" and, you know ... the classics of the day in the Midwest! This was in (like, they lived in) Sioux City, Iowa. When that broke up eventually ... because the kids, they formed different interests when they got older ... my mother quit high school when she was 14 and went on to become a professional singer from then on. So, this year was the 100th year anniversary of the Bathurst Family Singers. We figured out from books that my aunt had written that the band was started pretty much in 1926.

RRX: Speaking of family ... you and your husband are together in the band. Do you feel like this adds to this deep understanding of one another musically, or to your stage performances?

MG: Oh, definitely. Well, for one thing, I've always been into harmony. I mean, I was raised listening to the girl groups, and they did harmony ... old classic country bluegrass, and they all were harmony ... the Everly Brothers, everybody right across the board. And so, I fell in love with harmony and the older songs which we kind of stress in our group ... Mark and I sing harmony together, and I find that when you're singing harmony, you just get so close because you're just singing together so closely. It really forms a bond, and we were close already ... obviously, right? So, it just was natural. When we sing together ... I just get the chills because sometimes the tone is just one tone and it's not me and it's not him, it's like a third tone, and I just love it. So, it's really exciting. And because we love each other personally, our fans get a kick out of that.

RRX: "The Bluebillies", that's a mash-up

of blues and hillbilly, right?

MG: Bluegrass and hillbillies.

RRX: I love that. That's a cool name!

MG: Thank you! Well, they get it confused sometimes. They call us "Blueberries" or "Bluebellies," you know ... I'm always having to correct them. Since it's a made-up word, they don't get it.

RRX: That's funny! Now you guys have played everything from intimate acoustic sets to larger setups with full instrumentation. Do you feel like you've learned more from one or the other?

MG: I do like the smaller sets. Smaller configurations are better. I'd say, you know, three to four people is my favorite, but I'm thinking only because of rehearsal time, how much time you have to get together to rehearse ... which means how tight you can get. Mark and I and Greg have played the most together and we spent the most time rehearsing, so we're pretty tight, and so when we add a fourth person, like when we have our fiddler, Tucker, he's just a fabulous musician and beautiful fiddler and beautiful person, I might add ... when we add him ... we don't rehearse with him as often, but he knows right where to go on these songs, with such taste. But the more people you add, of course, the more time you have to rehearse because each person has their own place; they have their own solo, or they have their own place in the chord structure or whatever, and so I just let the guys work that out. I have the soloists all work it out. And/or if I want to hear something, you know, we'll work on it, whatever. At times we've had 55 musicians, but usually not over five people ... just can't ... just haven't done it, actually. I don't know, we could. But it takes a lot of work.

RRX: I get that. So, the last album you put out was "Never So Right" in 2025. Tell us a little bit about that. When the album came out, did you have certain expectations? Do you feel like there's a difference in your sound from the album prior?

MG: Yes, it's totally different, our (first) albums ... it was a gal from Iowa that was like an introduction, "Hello! Here we are! I'm from Iowa, from Sioux City!", and we did mostly bluegrass and old country, classic country, and the early tunes, and then we did a bluegrass gospel CD at that time too ... and then a couple of years later the "Adirondack Angels," which was not just me. And what we did, what we released last year, was a single. It was a two-sided single, two-song single, and one of the songs was "Run Daddy Run (Mama's Got a Gun)." That was about a story from my childhood, my dysfunctional childhood. And the flip side of that was "Willow and the Oak", which was a love story to my husband for when, at the time, he was working so hard during COVID ... he was the only person going to work besides the bosses there, and he had to cover everybody's jobs ... and so it was a love song for our anniversary.



Continued from Page 50...

so ... we rerecorded those and released that single. But we have three songs that we're working on, also. The one that you mentioned ... and a couple more tunes. So, what we want to do is finish those this year, and then next year, early 2027, release all five songs on a limited-edition CD. So that's exciting.

RRX: That is exciting!

MG: I can't wait. We've been transitioning from old-timey traditional bluegrass and classic country to more of an Americana alt-country band. In our recordings that we released this spring, "Run, Daddy, Run (Mama's Got a Gun)" and "Never So Right," we use drums and some electric guitar, for instance ... different than our simpler bluegrass lineup. Onstage, we have the same vibe, but we don't always use those instruments. Our sound is definitely evolving, and I love it! We still concentrate on vocal harmonies. Our other songs that we are finishing this year are (two more originals) "How'd I Ever Get to Bed," "Willow and the Oak," and a bluesy take on an old traditional gospel song, "When I Lay My Burdens Down." We're really looking forward to going back to Rockwell Pro Studios and working with Justin Metz on the finishing touches. When finished, we will be releasing these three songs plus the two songs on our single into an EP called "The Bluebillies in Paradise," set to drop next spring.

RRX: Great! Circling back to WAMM, just one more question. What are you most looking forward to at WAMM this year?

MG: I want to watch all the bands. I want to watch all of the women playing music. That's going to be the thrill for me and, of course, doing our songs. Performing will be exciting, very exciting, and I know that it's going to be a wonderful crowd. I love the audience there. Not just the singers and everybody, but the audience is so friendly. I was just really knocked over ... friendly audience. Everybody was smiling. Everybody was happy, and it was a wonderful, wonderful get-together of everybody, and there were women, and there were men. There was just a mix of everybody in the crowd, so it was just a great human experience. So, I'm looking forward to having that happen again.

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CS: It varies significantly. Some lawmakers have invested substantial time learning about cannabinoids, agriculture, manufacturing, and public policy. Others are still becoming familiar with the science and distinctions between hemp and marijuana. A large part of our advocacy work involves providing accurate information and helping policymakers understand the realities of the industry. Some of our lawmakers can't even pronounce the word "cannabinoid," let alone tell you what it means.

MBF: Once you explain the benefits of hemp, especially in relation to veterans' health, does it seem to change any minds?

CS: In many cases, yes. Personal stories often have a powerful impact. When lawmakers hear directly from veterans, patients, business owners, and consumers, it helps move the conversation beyond stereotypes and toward real-world experiences. Education tends to create more productive discussions. The old saying: "truth is on our side".

MBF: Overall, do you think most South Carolinians are interested in getting cannabis legalized?

CS: Based on conversations we've had with customers, retailers, veterans, healthcare advocates, and everyday citizens, there appears to be significant support for some form of cannabis reform. The details of what legalization

should look like are still debated, but public interest and public discussion have grown considerably over the past decade. There was a poll done in 2021 that showed that 84% of Republican voters in South Carolina want medical cannabis and 68% want recreational. Willing to bet money that the next poll will be larger

numbers in support of pro cannabis policy.

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Continued from Page 23..

RRX: This is the celebration of two decades of "Lemonade", do you feel nostalgic?

G: (Laughs) I feel super stoked about that record because it was an interesting time... we had just gotten dropped by Universal after we put out this record, "The Hustle", which I thought in my heart of hearts was going to be like a real breakthrough record for me. So we only got one record out with Universal and Brushfire, and the Universal side of that deal dropped us... and Jack Johnson and Emmett Malloy said to me, "don't worry, we're going to figure out a way to keep putting your records out" And they did and they signed us, just to Brushfire Records, a truly independent deal, so we went to work on that record "Lemonade". We had our own studio in Philadelphia, Philadelphonic Studios, so... for better or for worse, we worked on the record for the better part of a year. It was one of those records that... it's a collaborative record which was interesting because for us, that was our first real collaborative record and actually that was kind of on the heels of the Carlos Santana and John Lee Hooker collaborative records that were really big kind of blueprints for how an artist that's been around for a minute could, you know, come together with their musical community and do something a little bit different. And that's kind of how we approached "Lemonade". And the guest list - so for the first one... props to Emmett and Jack for getting us the opportunity to make another record and then for it to be an independent record. Then we started tapping all of our musical community, which is pretty diverse, so that's why on that record you got a hip hop act like Blackalicious and you got Jack Johnson and you got Slightly Stoopid on there, although they're not publicized. Donovan Frankenriess on there... Tristan Prettyman... Los Lobos is on the record. Ben Harper's on the record. Mark Broussard's on the record. There're just a lot of unbelievable artists that lent their hand to all the sounds in there... then Chris DiBenedetto was the producer, and he just did such a wonderful job on that record and man, it really stood the test of time. But right when it came out, it was crazy because the record went to number 2 on the iTunes charts - like, totally kind of unexpectedly! And then, it was our only record that cracked the Billboard Top 40. I mean, I'm proud of it. It went to number 39, so right inside the top 40 there, which is pretty cool for an artist like me. And it was a huge success and it was the only record up to that point that we ever made a dime on and now 20 years later, if you look at Spotify... well today the song got bumped... but because of the new collaboration with Slightly Stoopid, "Rainbow" has been, which is the song with Jack Johnson from that record which was never a single, has been my number one song on Spotify for the last year.

RRX: Speaking of nostalgia, I am a DJ and started my show last Thursday with "Astronaut". Every time I hear it, think of being in my twenties and I would just play that on a loop whenever I was on vacation in Cape Cod.

G: Oh sweet. I thought "Astronaut" was going to be my number one song, but then "Rainbow" ended up being my number one song, and I'm cool with that!



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Music Notes

The Art and Science of Music

By Peak Music Studios

The Myth of the Self-Taught Musician

Most people who learn a musical instrument begin in a straightforward way. You want to play violin, flute, trumpet, or piano, so you find the instrument, find a teacher, and begin. No one thinks that is weakness. Then we get to guitar and voice, and suddenly the mythology changes. Guitarists are told their heroes never had teachers. They just picked up a guitar and figured it out. Singers are told that great voices simply appear. You either have one, or you don't. It's a romantic story that is mostly false.

Self-taught rarely means untaught. It usually means the teaching was informal, invisible, or quietly removed from the legend. We celebrate the finished artist while erasing the teachers, the environment, the models, the repetition, and the work that made the artist possible.

Eddie Van Halen is often presented as proof that formal learning doesn't matter. He never followed a traditional guitar curriculum and never became a fluent music reader. That part is true. What usually gets left out is that his father was a professional jazz musician. Eddie took piano lessons as a child, won piano competitions, relied heavily on his ear, learned Eric Clapton solos note for note, and practiced obsessively. That is not a musical vacuum. It is a foundation. Being unconventional is not the same as being untrained.

Michael Jackson followed a similar path. He often built songs by singing bass lines, rhythms, chords, and melodies into a recorder instead of writing notation. But working by ear is not the same as working alone. Jackson spent years working with vocal coach Seth Riggs and collaborated with world-class choreographers who refined, challenged, and strengthened his ideas. Serious artists do not protect themselves from instruction. They

gather the best information they can find and use it to become more fully themselves.

Randy Rhoads never escaped education. He grew up in it. His mother founded the Musonia School of Music, where he studied guitar, piano, and theory before becoming a teacher himself. Even after becoming Ozzy Osbourne's guitarist, he continued seeking out classical guitar teachers whenever he had the opportunity. The better musicians become, the more aware they are of what they still do not know.

The same truth sits beneath the legend of Robert Johnson. The story says he sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads and returned a master of the blues. It's a great story, but the more likely explanation is that Johnson spent an extended period studying with guitarist Ike Zimmerman before returning with dramatically improved skills. The devil makes a better myth. A great teacher and a year of focused work make a better explanation.

At Peak Music and Dance, we believe a committed student can often reach a meaningful intermediate level in roughly three to five years. That depends on age, consistency, goals, health, and quality of instruction, so it is not a promise tied to a calendar. It is simply a way of understanding the size of the journey.

So, if it takes three to five years with a clear path, direct feedback, and someone helping you avoid mistakes, how long will it take if you also have to invent the path?

Many people make progress on their own. The problem is that the gaps often remain hidden until much later. We regularly meet guitarists and singers who have performed for decades. Yet they often say the same thing: "I can play the material I know, but I don't

really know how to play guitar." Or, "I can sing songs, but I don't feel free."

Freedom is the missing component.

A guitarist may memorize dozens of solos and still not know how to create one. A singer may reproduce a run from YouTube and still not know how to invent one. Freedom means understanding your instrument well enough to make musical decisions in real time rather than simply repeating what you've memorized. A song should be material you can shape.

Imitation is part of learning. Every great artist imitates before becoming distinct. The danger is stopping there. If your musical identity is built entirely from copying someone else's phrasing, sound, and technique, where does your own music begin?

YouTube is one of the greatest music libraries ever created, and we use it, too. It can demonstrate techniques, provide helpful explanations, and expose students to remarkable teachers. But YouTube was created to generate clicks, not teach. A video cannot hear what you just played. It doesn't know your picking falls apart when the tempo increases, that your tongue tightens on high notes, or that you are reinforcing the habit holding you back. A library gives you information. A teacher helps determine which information you need, in what order, and why what you're doing isn't working.

None of this means every teacher is good. Some can perform brilliantly but cannot explain what they do. Some teach only the music they personally love. Others hand every student the same songs and exercises regardless of their goals. Playing "Eruption" proves someone can play "Eruption." It does not prove they can diagnose your problems, build a path for your level, or

teach you how to become your own musician.

If you've had a bad teacher (and most of us have), the answer is not to abandon teachers. Find a better one. Look for someone who understands the style you want to play or sing. Look for a teacher with a path, not just a pile of songs. Look for someone who can explain why something works, diagnose why it doesn't, and whose students become more independent over time. A teacher should not make you need them forever; they should help you become free.

With healthy training and consistent work, most people can improve far beyond what they believed possible. The first leap is not a high note or a fast solo but is deciding to learn on purpose. You have to overcome the belief that training will make you less original, that asking for help means you lack talent, or that struggling proves you were never meant to do it. Those ideas feel protective because they give you permission to stop before you fail. They also stop you before you improve.

If music keeps pulling you back, then you belong in music. You may have average natural ability. Most of us do. You may need more repetitions, a different explanation, or a different teacher. None of that is a verdict. It simply means there is work to do.

Virtuosity is not a personality trait. It is a direction. It is the decision to keep removing limits, one honest piece of work at a time. I remember Maestro Kyle saying, "The only time you're really done in music is the day you stop learning." The great artists kept listening, practicing, asking questions, and finding people who could show them what they could not yet see.

Find the right teacher. Build the missing skills. Then use them to sound more like yourself.

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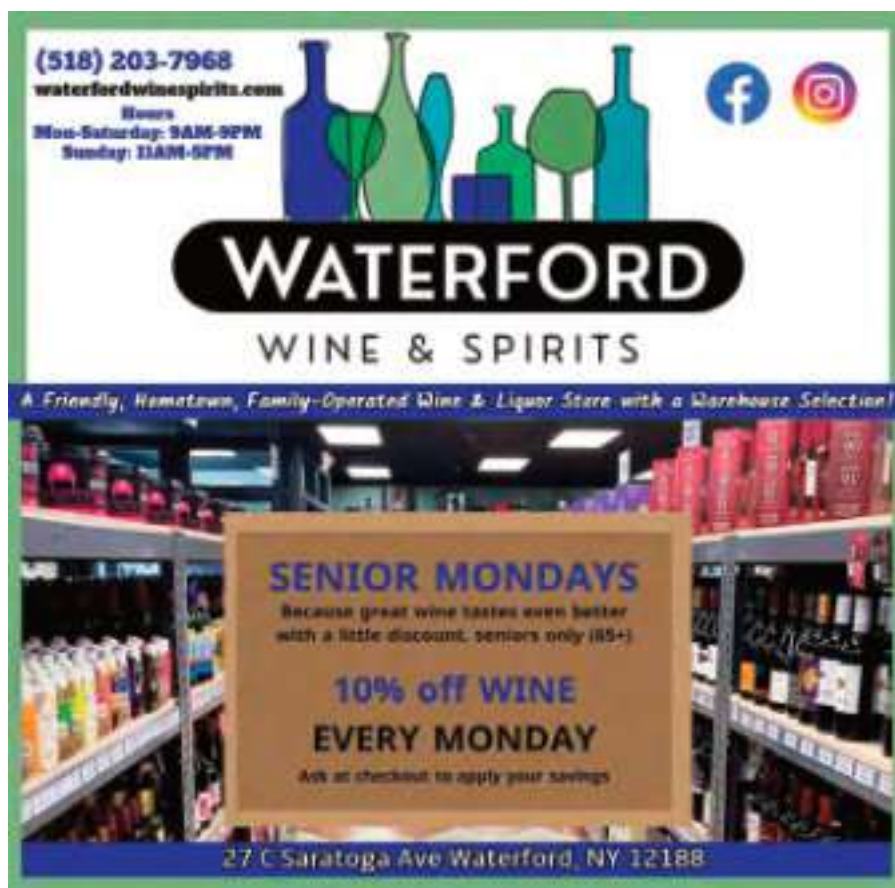
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An Interview

Finding Community at MopCo

by Larry Felton



When artistic director Michael Burns suggested Maria Ayoob as someone to interview at MopCo Improv Theater, he also invited me to enroll in her Improv 101 class. Three weeks later, after six hours as one of her students, I sat down with Maria to talk about how a Google search turned into an unexpected creative life.

What intrigued you enough to sign up for that first class—the one I am taking now?

Before I took the class, I read an article about what to expect in your first improv class. I was fascinated by the idea that something which looks so magical when people do it well can actually be broken down into learnable skills. I got really interested in the learning part of it—how do you learn those skills until they become this cool thing you see on stage?

What led you to improv?

I tried every hobby that you can think of. I always wanted to make sure I was doing something outside of work that was different from work. So I took woodworking classes and photography and knitting and all those things. But they would keep my interest for a few months, and then it would fall off.

Why did improv stick when nothing else had?

I think one of the things that drew me to improv is I've always liked connecting

with people through humor. There's also the fact that I'm in my fifties, and it's happening for me now. I never thought I would have this whole creative fulfillment happen for me at this age.

You've called MopCo the heart of this community. What do you mean by that?

People dive into the community. They come to Monday nights (MopCo holds drop-sessions for community members on Monday evenings), go to shows, meet people—and they create friendships and relationships out of it.

In my twenties, friendship was coffee-based. You talked, you ate, you drank coffee. This is different. The friendship is an outcome of an activity you're doing together, which has been very cool.

You've described the people at MopCo as geniuses who are also your loving friends. How does that happen?

I think it's taking those principles and really practicing them several hours a week—saying, "I'm going to appreciate what you're doing," instead of what happens in so many other parts of our lives. You're spending two hours delighting in other people and being delighted by them. What it's brought me is joy, honestly, which I don't think I ever would have imagined wanting. It wouldn't have even been a goal.

How did you end up teaching it?

Michael needed coverage for the first session of a four-week class, and he asked if anybody would do it. I said I'd shadow him for a class first, then try one myself—and I fell in love with it immediately. I love being able to spend two hours creating a space where people can feel safe, let their guard down, and laugh.

Do students find the same thing you did?

I had a woman in one of my first classes who came back the second week and said, "I work in sales, so I hear 'no' all the time, all day. This was two hours of hearing 'yes' and being affirmed."

I think that's a lot of what people get that they're not expecting—the power of approaching other people with a different attitude and being able to receive more from them in return.

What's the furthest you've seen a student take it?

I've only been teaching for about a year, but there are people from one of my first classes—a whole group of them started a troupe, and they're doing a performance at MopCo in a few weeks. A lot of people come back and keep taking classes. Some take Improv 101 again. A lot come back for Monday night workout sessions. People stick around.


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What would you tell someone before their first class—before the one I'm taking now?

I would tell them to just show up. That's one of the things improv has helped me do. This thing is going to happen, and I can't stop it, so I'm just going to show up, and we'll make something of it.

I would also tell them they're not going to have to work as hard as they think they're going to have to work.



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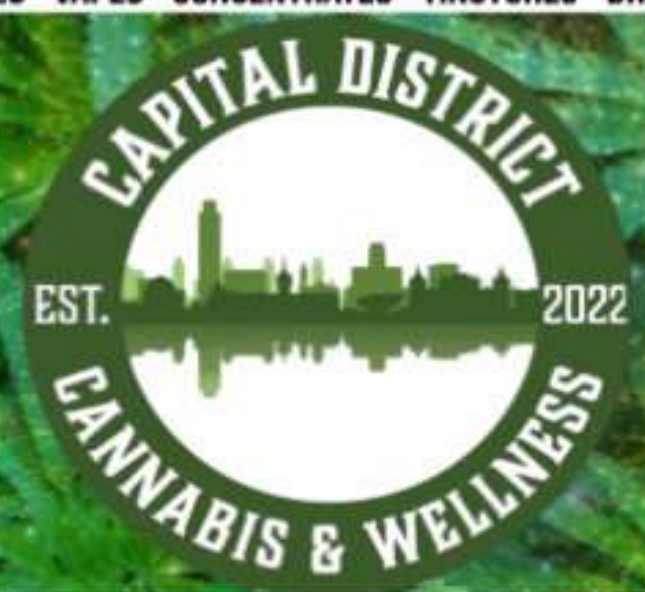
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BIER GARTEN

A Seat at the Banquet Table

by Sara Busone

Songwriter Blue Wilder chats with Sara Busone about live performances, her latest album, & WAMM

RRX: Have you played WAMM (Women Are Making Music) before?

BW: So, I've been connected with Nikki (Lee) and WAMM, I guess, for about a year now ... going to some of her small group camps and going to some of the other performances that have been organized. It's just, I think, an important thing to support, and Nikki's just a bundle of energy. She's great to be around.

RRX: She sure is! That's great. Now sometimes you're a solo performer, but you also collaborate with Swallowtail Vagabonds. Tell me a little more about that band.

BW: So, I put that band together about three years ago. I've got a long history in music, but this is actually the first band I've put together since, oh my gosh, the early '80s! So, I've mostly been doing a bit on my own, and then I was 10 years with, kind of doing backup vocals for another local group. So this has been fun to actually, you know, have the time and energy to put together a group and play with them regularly!

RRX: I was checking you guys out on Facebook. It looks like a great group. I also like your Facebook quote, "a songwriter with a voice that settles comfortably on the bluesy side of folk and Americana." Can you expand a little on that?

BW: Sure. I've always been a huge fan of both folk and blues, and a very, very early follower of people like Bonnie Raitt. I can remember seeing her in basements in Cambridge, and then also very early Nina Simone and others. So they've been real important people that I've learned from and followed over the years. And, you know, I am really also loving the more recent Americana way

of updating and adding new sounds to, you know, folk and country music. I just feel like a lot of these marketing genre designations are breaking down, and people are just doing music across many genres, and I'm very excited about that.

RRX: It is exciting! You had a CD release party recently at McGeary's for "Love in the Rearview." How has the reception been so far for your newest release?

BW: Oh, that's been great. It's been really fun. I had a really good turnout that day. We had a big crowd. I've sold a bunch of CDs and about half of my order now is gone, which is great.

RRX: Absolutely! So how long have you been performing overall?

BW: Oh my gosh. Well, do you count my first onstage performance with a guitar at about 9 years old at a summer stock theatre all my life?

RRX: Absolutely! That's fantastic. So you're probably very comfortable on stage! What would you say are some of the advantages and disadvantages of performing live in the area?

BW: Oh wow, well ... performances are always the best because you get audience feedback, of course. You know, it's immediate ... and you can tell if people are appreciating the music or not, and what is clicking with them, and it inspires you to up your performance and up your energy. So live performance is terrific, always great. You know, recording is a whole different thing ... because then you're - if you've got a good studio and a good engineer and producer - then you're like, "OK, given access to all this talent, how do I really want this song to sound?" And you can do it as many times as you want until you get that sound that you're looking



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for. So, yeah, just totally different experiences. Recently, they've both been really good for me. I'm just very excited and had a wonderful experience working with On Deck Studios on my CD. And then, the different performances I'm doing live, I have one that's a very acoustic-focused band, and then I have other local electric musicians who will back me up when I'm doing a bigger show. So I just feel I'm at this wonderful banquet table and can partake in the different parts that I want.

RRX: I love that analogy - banquet table! That's great! What is your vision moving forward? What are some things you hope to do, things you have on the horizon?

BW: Yeah, so, I am hoping to spread out a little bit in the places that I'm performing. So at the moment, really trying to reach out to a bit of Vermont and Western Massachusetts and down the Hudson. I'm not looking at this point to get on the road and be on the road constantly touring all over the place, but I would like to widen the area of which I am exposed. There are many, many good local musicians and people; even if they love you, they only want to hear you play the same song so many times. So, it's good to...

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Vinny Dawson

(*Kisstory, Sweet Leaf & Ultimate Sin*)

By Rob Smittix

RRX: Vinny, how's things?

VD: They're going, just trying to stay busy, you know?

RRX: Well, you are definitely doing that. I mean ... you got a bunch of shows coming up, but you also are doing more than just one project nowadays.

VD: Yeah, just added the Ozzy thing. The KISS thing is like ... I don't know what's going on, but it's kind of slowing down. The Ozzy thing is picking up more.

RRX: I would think, obviously with the recent passing of Ozzy, it would probably be a very popular show to do.

VD: And plus, we offer something different. We do Sabbath, all dressed like Sabbath from the '70s, and then second set I'll come out as '80s Ozzy, which nobody really does with the blonde. I'll just throw on the blonde wig and the '80s outfits.

RRX: So it's two different variations of Ozzy. That's cool. Tell me more about the Ozzy tribute and who's doing what in the bands.

VD: The Sabbath band Sweet Leaf, we've got Mike Hughes playing Tony Iommi, John Caulkins playing bass, and OJ (Barr), the drummer, plays in both bands. He plays in the '80s Ozzy Ultimate Sin too, which I have Ron Toth (guitar), who's awesome and amazing. I mean ...

RRX: He is.

VD: Yeah, when we did our first rehearsal with him, it was like having Jake E. Lee next to me.

RRX: Right? No, Ron's definitely got the skills.

VD: And playing bass is Dave Bariteau. I went to go see Crazy Train to see how he was doing his show, and I noticed they used a lot of ... he didn't have keyboards, and I'd rather have real keyboards. I noticed they're using, like, what I think they call click tracks; I'm not positive what they do ...

RRX: Almost like a sample.

VD: Yeah, and I didn't wanna do that. So, I got a keyboard guy (Cy Romleski).

RRX: Nice, so you're doing it the right way and the real way.

VD: Yeah, and then we also wanted to do that Lita Ford song, so we're gonna hire Athena, a local singer, to do that part with me. So that's in the works too.

RRX: You gotta do the Lita Ford song. "Close My Eyes Forever." Did I get it right?

VD: Yeah, because when I saw Crazy Train, he had opened up a casket and had a video screen in there. He had a girl singing it with him on the video screen, so it really wasn't live.

RRX: Again, you're doing it the right way. Others are cutting corners. Oh, that's cool, man. That Lita and Ozzy song was the soundtrack to the summer of 1988, if I remember correctly.

VD: I think you're right; I think it was 1987, 1988, somewhere around there.

RRX: And then of course you're still doing the KISSTORY thing. I noticed that you've got more of the Ozzy tribute shows coming up than your KISS tribute.

VD: There's four shows coming up for the rest of the

year with KISSTORY. I've been keeping it mostly to just the theaters and the festivals, you know? Kiss is almost like a cult following, but Ozzy's like huge. I mean, it's such a difference as far as the audience attendance too.

RRX: Sure. I've never seen KISS live, which sucks. But for me, KISS is more of a band that I would love to have seen live, and I think as far as tribute acts go, especially like KISSTORY, that's something that's gonna live on forever. I don't think that'll ever get old, but what I'm trying to say is, I was more into their live performances than the actual music itself, if that makes any sense. As a Kiss fan, "Beth" is probably my favorite song. But then with Ozzy, though, like you said, it's huge. Everyone from all over, everyone seems to be a fan of Ozzy's music, no matter your upbringing or your musical upbringing. Everybody's a fan.

VD: I wanted to bring something different. It's almost like our own Ozzfest tribute.

RRX: Do you bite the heads off of anything during these shows?

VD: Obviously, I'm not gonna throw water on anybody, but I got a bucket of water, and I get a bunch of rubber bats. What I'll do is toss that to the crowd. They seem to like it. And then I take the bigger bat, cut it, and whatever song I do, I'll bite the head off and then throw it back.

RRX: That's great crowd participation. So the Ozzy thing, it's kind of a new thing that you're doing, right?

VD: Years ago in the '90s, in my first tribute band, we did the Doors. And then I did AC/DC, but I was always trying to get an Ozzy one going. But back then, when you just had the Metroland, it was like slim pickings.

RRX: Right.

VD: I started the KISS thing in '96, and that's going on its 30th year. It didn't start picking up until the Internet came in.

RRX: But you do the whole thing, I mean... You do the fire blowing and all that stuff. You really put on a good performance.

VD: I've got all the props. We built the tank riser, we got the snake, and I got all the costumes from every year from '74 to ... we actually go from '73 to '83 is what I'm trying to do. And we added Vinnie Vincent with Ron. When he was jamming the Ozzy songs, one



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Canna Talk

By MBF & 400 River

Before working at one of New York's first recreational cannabis farms, I was living down in North and South Carolina - both states where cannabis is still illegal. There I was lucky enough to make the acquaintance of Chris Schneider, who now helps run Carolina Dream. The team down there is creating truly amazing hemp products and places a huge emphasis on advocacy, so let's see what Chris has to say!

MBF: Give us a bit of background about yourself!

CS: My name is Chris Schneider. I'm a Marine Corps veteran, entrepreneur, and currently serve as President of Sales for Carolina Dream. I've spent years building businesses in the wellness and cannabis-adjacent industries, and I'm passionate about helping people access high-quality hemp products they can trust. My focus has always been on education, transparency, and building relationships with customers, retailers, and lawmakers.

MBF: How did you get involved in the cannabis/hemp industry?

CS: Like many people, I was first exposed to cannabis through its wellness benefits. From having my own negative pharmaceutical experiences from my time at the VA seeking help for my PTSD, pain, sleep, and depression, cannabis helped me move forward with my life. Over time, I became interested in the science behind cannabinoids, terpenes, and their potential applications. That interest eventually led me into the hemp industry, where I saw an opportunity to help build a company that prioritizes quality, compliance, and consumer education so that all South Carolinians and Americans can have access to safe, quality products.

MBF: How was Carolina Dream born? How long have you been operating?

CS: Carolina Dream was founded by Marine Corps veteran Cody Callarman with a vision of creating a South Carolina-based hemp company built on transparency, quality, and integrity. From the beginning, the goal was to provide products that consumers could trust while helping educate people about hemp and cannabinoids. We've been operating for several years and have grown from a small startup into a vertically integrated manufacturer and distributor serving customers throughout South Carolina and beyond.

MBF: Tell us about the product lineup that Carolina Dream offers and your most popular product.

CS: Our product lineup includes nano-emulsified gummies, tinctures, and topicals. We focus on hemp-derived cannabinoids including CBD, CBN, CBC, CBG, terpenes, and federally compliant hemp-derived THC products. We also manufacture products for other brands and retailers throughout the Southeast. Our gummies have consistently been among our most popular products. Especially Dreamer+, our "fall asleep, stay asleep" gummy. Consumers appreciate their convenience, consistency, and predictable dosing. We have fast-acting nano-emulsified formulations focused on relaxation, recovery, and overall wellness, and those continue to be customer favorites.

MBF: Where can you sell your product?

CS: Our products are sold through licensed and compliant retail channels where hemp-derived products are permitted. We work with convenience stores, smoke shops, wellness retailers, liquor stores, and other specialty retailers throughout South Carolina and in other states where our products meet local regulations. We also have our online store www.carolindream.com and deliver to all 50 states.

MBF: What sets your products apart from others on the market in South Carolina?

CS: What truly sets Carolina Dream apart is that we're not just a hemp company; we're actively helping shape the future of the hemp and cannabis industry in South Carolina.

Our team is deeply involved in advocacy and policy discussions at the state level. My business partners and I regularly spend time at the South Carolina State House in Columbia during legislative sessions, working directly with lawmakers, regulators, and stakeholders to provide industry insight and help develop responsible regulations surrounding hemp and cannabis. We often assist policymakers in understanding the science, manufacturing standards, consumer safety concerns, and economic opportunities associated with hemp-derived products.

We believe South Carolina has a unique opportunity to become a national model for sensible cannabis and hemp regulation. Rather than simply copying what other states have done, we advocate for policies that prioritize consumer safety, product transparency, responsible manufacturing, age restrictions, testing standards, and support for local businesses.

That same commitment carries over into our products. Every Carolina Dream product is manufactured with transparency, third-party testing, and strict quality standards. We don't just want to participate in this industry; we want to help build it the right way. As a veteran-owned company, we also believe strongly in educating the public about hemp and cannabinoids and ensuring consumers have access to safe, compliant products they can trust. Our goal is to raise the standard for the

e industry not only in South Carolina but across the country.

MBF: What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when starting?

CS: One of the biggest challenges has been operating in an industry where regulations continue to evolve. Educating consumers, retailers, and policymakers has been just as important as building products. Access to banking, payment processing, insurance, and capital have also historically been challenges for many companies in the cannabis and hemp space. One of our biggest challenges is special interests of a few leaders in South Carolina who have a chokehold on moving further with pro-hemp and cannabis regulation in our state.

MBF: What is the legal status of cannabis in SC? What about hemp products?

CS: South Carolina does not currently have adult-use cannabis legalization. Hemp products, however, became federally legal under the 2018 Farm Bill, provided they meet applicable

federal and state requirements. Hemp-derived cannabinoid products have created a significant industry in South Carolina, though regulations continue to evolve.

MBF: You and your colleagues are super involved in the legal discussion about the sale of hemp products in the state right now. Can you give New Yorkers a quick rundown of what is happening down south?

CS: South Carolina lawmakers are actively debating how hemp-derived cannabinoid products should be regulated going forward. As of right now, in the summer of 2026, our legislative body has a hemp bill that could restrict all hemp products to liquor stores only, a milligram cap of 10mg THC for beverages and gummies, and smokeables will be outright banned.

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Pete Mason

An Interview by Rob Smittix

RRX: I know you have a book coming out; that's what we need to talk about. I purposely don't know much about it yet. I'd like to learn together. So you tell me what's going on.

PM: Well, the new book is the first in a series of three that I have planned out. One for this year, one for 2028, and one for 2030. The first one being "The Widespread Alphabet," which focuses on the music of Widespread Panic. Great band from the great town of Athens, Georgia, where the B-52s, REM, and Drive-By Truckers all came from ... and Panic, I would say that they have to be the biggest of the four. Their music and lyrics ... ever since I've started listening to them, which is literally 26 years ago the other day. Driving to Hartford to see Phish, my brother popped in "Light Fuse, Get Away," and I was hooked. From there, I've just been seeing the band, listening to every single show that comes out, collecting tapes and CDs back in the day, and trading them. Somewhere during COVID, I started working on a Widespread Panic kids' book because I just finished my second Phish one and Panic just seemed natural. It took a few years to track down the proper illustrator (Mark Serlo) to work with me alongside this.

RRX: What a concept. I love that. It's obviously for the kids and all that, but also you're pointing them in the direction of keeping it cool with the music. Does the band know about this? Because they should.

PM: They do. We reached out to them, and it turned out they were somewhat interested in selling the book, possibly. They wanted to see some of the pages, and we shared them, and we kinda got the okay, no notes, and we moved forward. They were just at Red Rocks, and they got a couple weeks on the road out west. I figure after that's over, this Kickstarter should be over too (and hopefully successful), so we can move ahead to tighten it up, get it published, and get it out there. It's gonna be a hit. This is a band that has a huge fan base stretching all across the South, up into the Midwest, big fan base in Colorado and other points west. They do have some children's items but nothing beyond some clothing here and there. I didn't go into this thinking, what's the band's void that I can fill? I just started working on it. We put it together, and it turned out they were interested in it, on top of all this. So they're aware; it's the first time we let the band know. We're not using anything copyrighted or trademarked on their end. It's all inspired by the music, so it's fun for the kids. It'll be well received by kids and fans alike.

RRX: Absolutely, it's almost like one of those things where no idea is too crazy. It's definitely an original idea to take inspiration from a band that's well known and then



communicating it through a children's book. I think you're onto something here and that void that you're talking about as far as merch for kids ... with the exception of onesies and stuff like that, you really don't see much out there for kids at concerts and stuff.

PM: Yeah, there's small tchotchkes and things that could qualify as something for a kid, and maybe they're just getting a small poster or postcard or whatever, but actual kids' items ... especially something that is written by a teacher with literacy skills in mind, that's kind of been the focus of it. It's not like this is just a quick job, just to get it done. There's a lot of time and thought put into it to make sure that the kids are gonna be able to read the words, pronounce the words, and sound them out. Try not to put a word that's too heavy in there for them, and make sure that whoever's reading to them can also read the words. The font had to be adjusted to make it all as accessible as any children's book should be. Because if it's not accessible, the kid's not gonna go pull it off the shelf and say, "Read this to me." And that's our target audience, kids that say I want this read to me.

RRX: That's pretty cool, and you've done this a couple of times before with Phish?

PM: Yeah, I wrote two. The first children's book I wrote was in like 2016, "The Alphabet Book for Little Phans/From Antelope to Zero." And then I did a Grateful Dead book in between, "The Grateful Book

of Letters." Then I went back to Phish, and I did "Counting Down the Number Line," and I took every numerical reference of Phish that I could find in their songs; I only used like one cover song, "2001." And just kind of went backwards from 2001 to 555 and went backwards down the number line, just like the song. All three books have been wildly successful, and I'm selling on average at least one a day, which is great.

RRX: No kidding, that is great.

PM: It's going great, and we stay away from all the trademark stuff or stuff they might complain about. I can even say with a bit of confidence that there was a show on October 28th, 2021 in Las Vegas for Phish and it opened up with "2001." They don't do that very often, very rarely, and then the second song was "1999," and I turned to my friend, and I was like ... you've gotta be kidding me. I think they're gonna start going backwards here, aren't they? And the next song was "5:55," and then "46 Days," and I was like, wow, this is basically the book.

RRX: Right!

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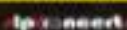
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EAT IN/TAKE OUT

The Prog Digest

By Klyde Kadiddlehumper

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Ladies and gentlemen (and I use those phrases loosely given the nature of most folks I meet reading these fine words), I fear this edition of Klyde's musings brings bad news.

Horrible news.

News one cannot ignore nor fix.

News we all suspected, but that no one would readily admit.

Ready ...

Humpty Dumpty didn't fall. He was pushed.

Yes, I know ... I know. Your childhood now seems like a complete lie.

How can you believe anything with this revelation?

Then again, how can you believe the cretins who go around on Facebook claiming to be the "Official Brand X" – which they are not.

Now, for those unfamiliar, Brand X was a brilliant jazz/rock/fusion band that is, in many cases, categorized as prog. If Prog Magazine can say it and extol the virtues of a new, live album from 1977 - who am I to argue?

Yes - I am directing that at you – the one known as "The Schwartz."

Anyway ...

There's a history – and a sordid one at that.

OK, there are many bands with an "X" in the name: X, X Japan, Generation X. And my favourite – X-Ray Spex. Oh, how we miss you, Poly Styrene.

Anyway, these cats knew all kinds of interesting musicians and started as a band influenced by AWB and TOP – nice, huh?

Originally consisting of Peter Bonas, John Dillon, Phil Spinelli, John Goodsall, Percy Jones, and Robin Lumley, the as yet unnamed band signed a contract with Island Records. With me so far? Good.

Not having a name, it was suggested they get the generic mention of – you guessed it – Brand X.

Horrible News..

Drummer John Dillon wasn't interested in moving to the jazz/fusion side of the aisle, and he was, ummm, quietly let go. So, they needed a drummer.

Oh, where to find a good drummer in England in the mid '70s?

Bill Bruford was rather busy and declined.

There was this guy whose lead singer had announced leaving the band after their current tour. Having some spare time, Phil Collins was the hired gun. Never a member of the band per se, but Hit & Run became the management, Phil was signed through Phil Collins Ltd. from inside Hit & Run. Can you see the financial issues that could arise from that?

Anyway – as one might imagine – a whole bunch of people thought "Oh how nice, Phil has a little side project he runs." Not the case at all. He never signed with (then) Charisma Records and was never a "real" member.

Goodsall, Jones and Lumley were very serious about the band. As Phil Collins once said, he saw "Genesis as the wife, and Brand X as the mistress with the big t#*!"

As we all know, Phil stayed with Genesis and had a nice little solo career, thank you very much.

Music business monies, expired visas, "new" management for the reunion tours with no real members claiming to be the Official Brand X Facebook page, and more craziness have cost money and time. The last living member, Percy Jones, as well as the family members of the late John Goodsall and Robin Lumley continue the good fight.

Now for the news that does not suck.

Available for purchase now at a rate that will go up at the end of August is "Theory of Nothing," a new 2-CD set of a live show from 1977. Mostly music from the "Moroccan Roll" album as well as some nuggets from the not yet released "Masques." Damned fine records to say the

least.

Check these guys out at officialbrandx.com and order the new release from their Bandcamp site.

Music management is run by the same people who are from the government – they all say, "We're from the government. We're here to help."

Things you know about your old Uncle Klyde: this certainly does not make me a dime. It's fun and, sometimes, informative.

They say you have to break some eggs to make an omelet.

Just don't get pushed, like Humpty Dumpty.

Until next time.

Klyde




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