

CD Highlight

Dan Geib with the Art Gomperz Band

by Dan Miller

In the early days of bluegrass music most performing bands followed a formula that was developed by the “Father of Bluegrass,” Bill Monroe, and other early bands, such as the Stanley Brothers. However, as time moved on the repertoire began to grow and stray. During the 1950s, in an effort to compete with rock and roll, some bands experimented with drums and started augmenting their repertoire with songs that they felt would appeal to the modern listener. During the 1960s Flatt and Scruggs started performing on the college circuit and added folk tunes and songs written by contemporary writers, like Bob Dylan. During the late 1960s and into the 1970s bands like the Country Gentlemen and the Seldom Scene began broadening the repertoire to an even greater degree. Additionally, Earl Scruggs and his sons started exploring country rock, the New Grass Revival introduced rock-based bluegrass, and David Grisman started mixing bluegrass instrumentation with jazz and swing. This expansion of the bluegrass repertoire has continued to this day and although “hard core” bluegrass fans don’t like it, it seems as though just about any style song that can be played by a band that employs traditional bluegrass instrumentation can be a “bluegrass” song.

Because the repertoire of a bluegrass band can be very diverse, bluegrass guitar players have had to learn how to play everything from traditional bluegrass, to blues, jazz, swing, Western swing, Gypsy jazz, rock and roll, boogie-woogie, classical, folk, and beyond. But this is not something that is new to flatpicking. As mentioned in our cover story article, if we look back at the repertoire of players like Doc Watson, Tony Rice, and Clarence White, this is something that we have been prepared for by flatpicking’s founding fathers. Their repertoire has always been very diverse and if we were listening to them, we were prepared.

Anyone who gets a job as the lead guitar player in a bluegrass band these days has better be a “jack of all trades” when it comes to repertoire because with many modern bluegrass bands, when it comes to song selection, just about anything goes!



The CD Highlight feature for this issue, *A Different Story to Tell* by the Art Gomperz Band, could be considered one of those “anything goes” projects. However, the lead guitar player on this CD, Dan Geib, was well prepared to handle the diverse material as he has been playing a wide variety of musical styles in the context of a bluegrass band for over forty years. For many of those years Dan was the banjo player in the band, but for the last twelve to fourteen years he has been more focused on his guitar work. Although Dan has been playing in the same band for nearly forty years (through many personnel changes), this new project is very close to the heart of everyone in the band as the band member who wrote the majority of the material, Bev Hahn, passed away during the CDs production.

A Michigan native, Dan Geib started playing guitar in high school. Like most kids in high school during the early 1970s he and his friends were interested in playing rock and roll music. Dan said, “We listened to bands like Uriah Heep, the Doobie Brothers, and the Allman Brothers. I was a big Dickey Betts fan.” Dan played guitar in a rock band while he was in high school and said that the band was very fortunate to have a musically talented neighbor, who was just a couple years older, help them with their arrangements.

About the time he finished high school Dan started picking with some friends who were interested in bluegrass and acoustic music. Dan said, “I started playing banjo

in about 1976 because everyone else played the guitar and we needed a banjo player. I had been interested in the banjo from hearing it on the Beverly Hillbillies theme song. So my decision to play the banjo was about fifty percent desire and fifty percent opportunity.” Dan bought the Earl Scruggs book and began learning how to play the banjo from tab.

Although the group that Dan started playing with in the late 1970s called themselves a bluegrass band, he also says, “We were rebels.” They played everything from “Born to be Wild” and “Black Magic Woman” to a medley of theme songs from Gilligan’s Island, Petticoat Junction, and the Beverly Hillbillies. Dan said, “We played a lot of non-traditional songs, but we arranged them for bluegrass.” The name of the band was The Art Gomperz Band, and although it has gone through many personnel changes, the band has the same name to this day. Dan said, “Our bass player, Mark Albers, and I have been playing music together since the 1970s. ‘Art Gomperz’ is Mark’s nickname.”

During the band’s early years Dan played banjo most of the time because the band’s lead singer, Dan Pavlides, was also a guitar player. He continued playing mostly banjo until about eleven years ago when Dan Pavlides passed away. Dan said, “When Dan Pavlides passed away, I shifted into the guitar spot because that fit the mix of musicians that were in the band at that time.”

Although the band has change personnel and their activity level has ebbed and flowed over the years they have considered the band to be a consistent entity. Sometimes their repertoire would change as the personnel shifted. Dan said, “At one point in time we had a piano player, Willey T. Rose, who was great at Jerry Lee Lewis style boogie-woogie. When he was with us we played everything from fiddle tunes to jump jive. We’ve always been pretty eclectic. We keep enough bluegrass in the repertoire that we can play a bluegrass gig, however, we also play swing, Texas blues, and boogie-woogie. At one point in time we were also playing a lot of Asleep at the Wheel and Commander Cody style music.”



Dan Geib

About ten to twelve years ago, when the band was in a lull period, Dan started playing in an acoustic duo with singer/songwriter Bev Hahn. At first both Dan and Bev played guitar and their show consisted of mostly Bev's original songs with a few cover tunes thrown into the mix. Later Bev learned how to play solid rhythm on the mandolin and added that instrument to the show.

Eventually Dan and Bev's duo started to grow when one-by-one Mark Albers joined in on the bass; Allen Bates came aboard to play Dobro, mandolin, and banjo; and Bob Flood added mandolin, second guitar and vocals to the mix. When all of these fine musicians joined the group, this was the point when the band started to really take off. Dan said, "Bev was our driving force." They were performing shows in Michigan—opening shows for performers like Drew Emmitt and the Steep Canyon Rangers—and then began working on a new CD.

Dan tells the rest of the story in the CD's liner notes: "Bev and I began playing music about ten years ago while she was playing a small local pub. She asked me to 'bring my guitar and sit in sometime.' So I did, and from that jam sprouted over a decade of music together. While Bev always came loaded with armfuls of cover material, it was Bev's songwriting (as you can now hear) that set her apart from so many musicians that I have played with over the years."

"The genesis of the Art Gomperz Band has enjoyed such a variety of musicians moving in and out of the band, that Bev often mentioned it was much more like a musician's club than a band. Luckily for

all of us, Bev's transition to the band was swift and we found ourselves taking on a new sound and direction of NewGrass Americana as Bev provided one new song after another from genres of bluegrass, swing, folk rock and country ballads."

"In 2008 Bev and I embarked on an ambitious plan to build a studio and create a CD of select material that Bev had written for both our duo as well as the band. In the midst of all the excitement, we were able to get all tracks for nine songs completed and we were just waiting for Bev to finish

her final vocal tracks. It was a wait that no one ever knew would be forever as Bev's spirit left us on the morning of September 30, 2008."

Dan said that Bev's passing "really took the wind out of our sails." For a while the band stopped performing, but they were determined to finish the CD, so they brought in long-time friend and accomplished vocalist Jenna Mammina to sing Bev's vocals. Dan said, "I expressed to Jenna that there was no one on the planet who could be considered Bev's musical soul mates as much as Jenna and I and that only with Jenna could I properly finish Bev's material and our vision."

The mix of the Art Gomperz Band's talented instrumentalists, Bev's songwriting, and Jenna's captivating voice makes for a very enjoyable listening experience. Although the majority of the songs would fall into the singer/songwriter category, the bluegrass instrumentation gives it a bluegrass flavor. There are a few tunes that were not written by Bev, namely the instrumentals—Dan Geib's "Court In Session," and a Mike Auldridge number, "Spanish Grass." Although Jenna sings lead on nine of the discs twelve tunes, we do get to hear Bev's voice on the final tune "From the Beginning."

Dan's guitar work is all over this disc and it is solid throughout. He demonstrates the ability to play to the style of each tune. Although he said that he has learned a lot from tab books and that his guitar style is "plug and play from a huge repertoire of licks," it doesn't come across that way. When I mentioned that I didn't get the sense of him being a "lick player" from the

recording, Dan admitted that a lot of that had to do with working with Bev.

When Dan and Bev first started working together he said that he would improvise on Bev's songs, but it was mostly using licks that he learned from other players. Bev encouraged him to try to create a sound that was all his own. One way that she pointed him in that direction was to insist that when he first learned one of her songs, he should just play the melody instead of grabbing from his bag of licks. Dan remembers, "When she showed me a new song she'd written she'd say, 'this week just play the melody. Next week you can add some ornaments, but I don't want you to ever let go of the melody.' So, I started following her advice." Early on in their musical partnership Bev and Allen would also say things to Dan like, "Dude, we're not paying you by the note!" Dan got the hint and as a result his solos on this record are very tasteful.

Although Dan's guitar work is most prominent on the two instrumental numbers, for this issue's audio selection and transcription, we have selected a swing style tune called "I'll Say Good Bye To You." Regarding his solo, Dan said, "When Bev brought this song to me she said, 'I want to hear you do something different. Play along with this swing progression.' The solos that I take here are really a combination of some Tony Rice style blues licks and some licks that I play on 'Dixie Hoedown.' It is all G scale stuff up around the 7th fret." We present Dan's intro to the tune and the solo that starts 1:57 into the tune. If you'd like to take a look at Dan's complete solo or any of his solos from this CD, he has transcribed them on his website www.flatpickingtabs.com.

Today the Art Gomperz Band is performing in support of the CD in and around Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Lansing, Michigan. Additionally, they are also starting to tour outside of their home state. On August 14th of this year they performed in Henderson, Kentucky, on the same festival bill as Patty Loveless, Claire Lynch, Lou Reid, Red Molly, Frank Solivan, The Boxcars, and others. I encourage you to catch one of their shows or pick up a copy of the CD. This CD is highly recommended!





Audio CD
Track 43

I'll Say Goodbye To You

Arranged by Dan Geib

1

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7

T
A
B

5

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7

S

9

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7

S
H
H
H

13

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7 G

H P P P H P H P

I'll Say Goodbye to You (con't)

1

G B6 C6 D7

TAB

6

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7

10

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7

14

G B6 C6 D7 G B6 C6 D7 Em