

Ancient Victorys

The past forty years are celebrated today... we go into the future presenting and documenting Northwest acoustic musicians

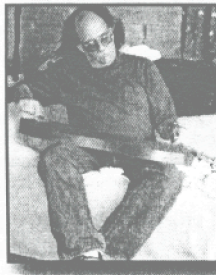
A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 4 - Winter 2009/2010

Reviews

15 CD, book and concert reviews of Ancient Victory Musicians

Page 13



Dan Roberts
Looks and Sounds Like a Folksinger (Celtic, Folk, Maritime, Renaissance, Pop/Rock, Classical, Blues)
Page 3

Steve & Kristi Nebel
Folking from Alaska to the United Kingdom
Page 5



Ancient Victorys Open Mike,
Thurs. March 11
Thurs. June 10
7:00 p.m.
Antique Sandwich
Page 13

Thaddeus Spae

Cole Porter of Vaudeville Folk

I sat down with Thaddeus Spae one afternoon recently at Victory Music's Q Café in Ballard and videotaped a conversation that was as multi-faceted as his musical performances. I kept expecting him to pull a trombone out of his back pocket to illustrate the physics of acoustics in brass instruments, or a set of punch cards he used to program a bedroom-sized 32kb IBM 1130 computer at Reed College in Portland in 1969. Having studied electronic music later at Evergreen College in pursuit of a degree in "Wandering Minstrelsy", his interests range wide, he has delved into many subjects and emerged the wiser for it. Picking Thaddeus' brain is like browsing through a curiosity shop of musical, technological and philosophical wonders. You never know what you might discover in there, but it's always fascinating. His passion for gizmos and gadgets is contagious and his descriptions of all things folk are always colorful and engaging. He is an intense and passionate synthesist of the musical arts, plays a variety of musical styles and instruments, both solo and in several bands. In short, the kind of musical artist that refuses to be easily categorized and therefore a real challenge to market in a society such as ours where value = marketing ease. But to the cultural microcosm of Ancient Victorys, Victory Music, and the overall folk scene of the Northwest, he is a rare treasure and a delight to behold.

You can read a great article about Thaddeus' musical influences and career by Percy Hilo in the online January, 2010 issue of the Victory Review (see "Folking Around" in the archives at www.victorymusic.org). But in the conversation, I had with Thaddeus last week, I was primarily interested in getting to know more about this strange and wonderful presence I had witnessed at the quarterly Ancient Victorys open mikes over the past year. I barely had time to scratch the surface, but I discovered a joyfully creative human being full of paradoxes.

Doing the videotaping and producing DVDs for Ancient Victorys recently, I found Thaddeus to be an unusually lively and expressive character on stage.



He occupies a different 'personal space' from the quiet introspective stereotypical folksinger/singer/songwriter. Spae learned the art of vaudevillian performing at festivals and on street corners many years ago working with Reverend Chumleigh, the Flying Karamazov Brothers and Artis the Spoonman. In that environment it is essential to utilize every nuance, musical hook and every trick in the book to command the space around (continued on page 8)



Thaddeus Spae (continued from page 3)

you. If you don't draw a crowd, you're just taking up space (and taking home no dough). So you learn to project and keep people's interest with humor and lively energy. When the crowd gets infected, it feeds back to the performer and energizes the performance all the more, so the crowd gets a better show, and the performer makes more dough. So everybody wins.

Later Thaddeus met and travelled extensively with the first love of his life, Sandabeth, a dynamic vocalist and soulful woman who could also generate that kind of live energy that infects audiences in that positive, life-affirming way. They played festivals in Arizona and travelled the Southwest and West Coast trying out various kinds of musical styles, eventually finding a winning combination of folk, and blues with a strong connection to the spiritual underpinnings of gospel and jazz. They found this so much more rewarding than the electronic lounge music they had been trying to make it with previously in clubs. Once again, it was more of an outdoors, festive kind of music meant to be played in the sunshine rather than in smoky clubs and bars.

Then Sandabeth's health started to suffer from a particularly aggressive form of arthritis. They performed still as long as they could, but eventually the disease took hold and Sandabeth became critically ill. Thaddeus became her primary care-giver during the last months of her life. Having gone through that myself, I have seen firsthand how much that kind of intensive care can take out of a person. But in a mysterious way it restores something in us at the same time as it is robbing us of so much. I guess it's our humanity. In the face of so much loss, hope becomes the daily mantra and over time that establishes a kind of humility and understanding in us. In the grieving process that follows the loss of a loved one, for a long time hope is all we have. I watched Thaddeus perform St. James Infirmary Blues at Ancient Victories not long after Sandabeth passed over. He sang and played his trombone in a soulful rendition that was at once mournful and celebratory, as only the blues can be. Like the New Orleans jazz procession described in the song, it had that strange brew of loss and life-affirming hope that is not so much named as it is 'played'. And so here was another paradox to this complex musical human being. Any sarcasm that might have existed in his humor previously had become tempered having passed through the fire of grief.

But just as a sword is tempered by fire, Thaddeus has not lost his edge. On the contrary, he's become sharper than ever. Witness the clever liturgy he delivers in his song "Turtles All the Way Down" from his latest CD, *Campfire Jazz*. This took 3rd place in the Tumbleweed Festival songwriting contest, but it's a first-rate song full of humor and insight into the bewildering world of religious philosophy. Tackling such a thorny subject and doing it with humor and grace is the mark of real genius.

Visit Bard's Cathedral, Thaddeus' website for several of the musical services he offers (www.bardscathedral.com) and you'll read this on the Online Store page:

"Thaddeus Spae rejoices in the talents of ten men with the time and energy of only one. Or two. Or at the most three. A composer, songwriter, essayist, graphic designer, entrepreneur and aging wildman, He flogs his musical services online at tspae.com and commits atrocities against logic, reason and philosophical orthodoxy with the Thaddeus Gazette, thaddeusgazette.com"

His wit and 'atrocities against logic, reason and philosophical orthodoxy' are self-evident in his live performances as they are in his writing. Taking his vaudevillian street energy indoors onto the folk stage is like taking your pet Irish Setter into an art museum, watching it run amongst the visitors, jumping up on laps and licking the paintings, tail wagging and ready to play with anyone who comes along. He seems to cultivate a playfulness and joy in all his endeavors which is probably why he is so effective at his work. At Bard's Cathedral, as in his monthly articles in the online Victory Review, you'll see his work ranges from assistance in graphics design and desktop publishing for recording artists, to post-production work and recording.

You'll find his CDs available there along with those of many he's helped to produce such as Klez Katz, Reverend Chumleigh, Amber Tide, Sandabeth, Erick Friedrick, the Emerald City Jug Band, Jonny Hahn, Tribal Voices, Steve and Kristi Nebel, Snake Suspenderz and a host of others.

On more than one occasion I have gone to Thaddeus for technical advice and received prompt and actually understandable assistance, which is a gift in itself given the range of skill sets one has to master these days with recording hardware and software, not to mention video and all its idiosyncracies. His articles in the online Victory Review on CyberGraphics and the Revenge of the Software and DIY Desktop Publishing are full of useful and practical information for anyone trying to navigate the digital world of recording, cover art and CD duplication. While the technology has brought into our garages and living rooms capabilities that used to only be accessible in expensive studios, understanding all the little tricks to making it work for your particular application is no small feat. But visit Thaddeus's Bard's Cathedral website and you'll find a wealth of services available for very reasonable rates. Check out his newest CD *Campfire Jazz* for a great example of how to put together a short run package that is as attractive as it is cheap.

Looking at where the recording industry has been since the Beatles and where it's going with Google and YouTube, Thaddeus sees the future of folk music not only surviving in a digital world, but actually thriving. But it will always need to be fed and driven by a live, local scene. Which is why he appreciates the new directions Victory Music has taken with so many talented volunteer staff and writers, and the great community Ancient Victories is fostering with its quarterly events at the Antique Sandwich Company for us 'uber-geezers' who intend to keep right on going regardless of (or in spite of) things like American Idol and a pop culture which simply consists of one bubble popping after another. Thaddeus believes in the "functional" aspect of folk music, that is, how "all music becomes folk music once it hits the ears of a human being." Folk purists will argue that you can't have "new" folk music – anything after Harry Smith's Smithsonian Folkways collection or not collected by Alan Lomax simply isn't folk music. But live folk music and streaming folk music programs on the internet like Folk Alley, and KBCS's nationally syndicated weekly polls of the most played folk albums are proving that simply is not the case.

At last week's open mike at the Q Café, Thaddeus presented a new song he'd written for the new love of his life Ada-Reva Franklin. They were just wed in January and she wanted a romantic love song. So he penned what is sure to become another Spae-classic; "I'll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours". Despite the double-entendre, it really ends up with a timeless valentine from the heart with "I'll give you mine, if you give me yours". And, the song contains a marvelous jazzy harmonica instrumental break that is very "Toots"-ish (after jazz-harmonicist Toots Thielman). Which reminded me to ask him on the way out that night about the wonderful five-minute dissertation I heard him deliver one night on the three different modes used on a standard harmonica depending on whether you want to play folk, blues, or jazz. Thaddeus lives in all three modes. He truly is the "Cole Porter of Vaudeville Folk". (*Tim McKamey*)