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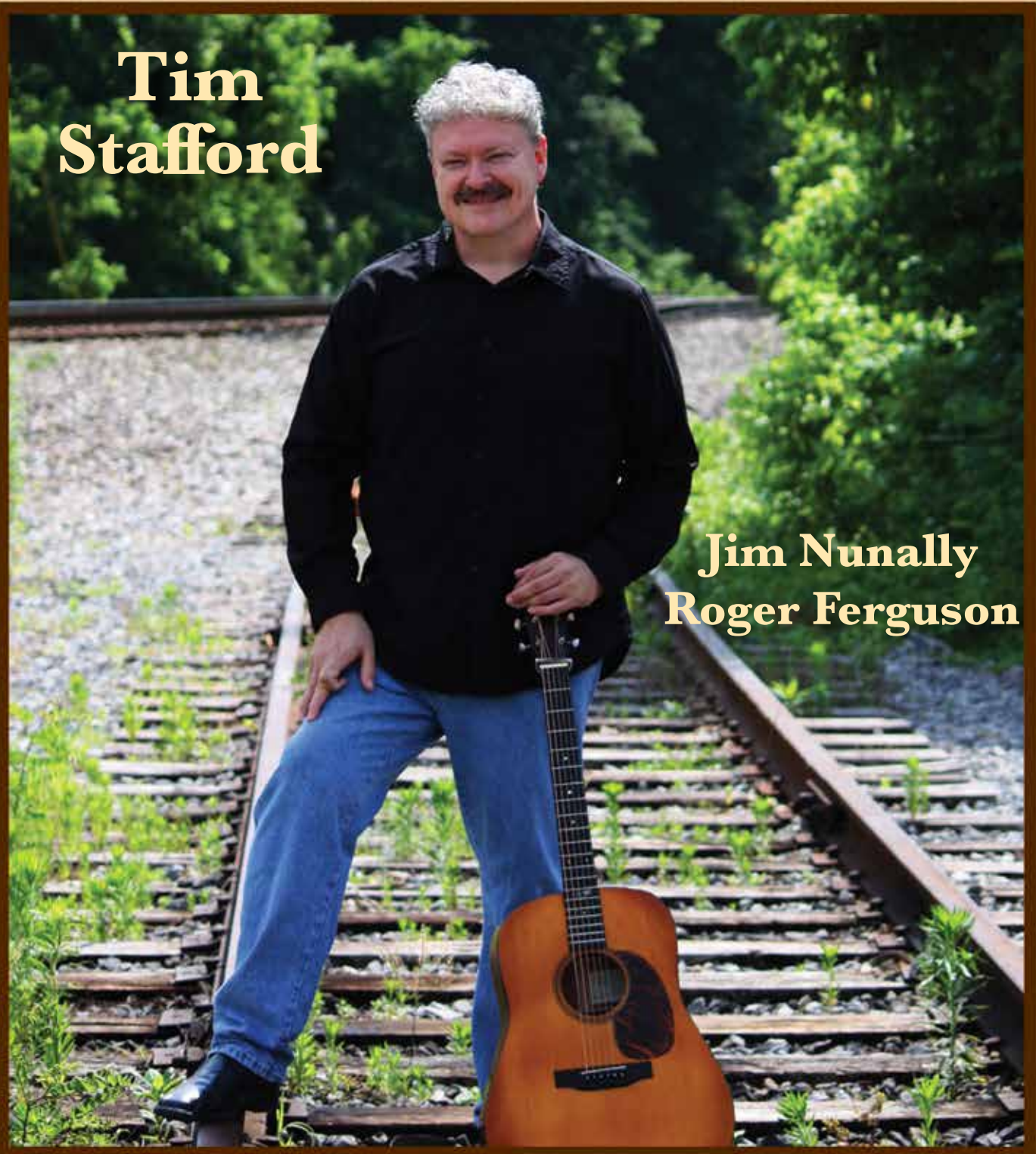
Flatpicking Guitar

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Roger Ferguson**



Flatpick Highlight: Roger Ferguson

by Dan Miller

Roger Ferguson has been on my flatpicking radar for a very long time. I've known about him and have been trying to feature him in the magazine for years. But, Roger is a very busy guy. He wanted to wait until the solo CD that he has been working on was ready to be released. But due to his heavy teaching, recording, and performing schedule, his solo project seemed to always be on the back burner. However, now that he is putting the finishing touches on that recording he finally consented to do the interview and we are happy to have him as a featured artist in this issue.

I first ran across Roger's name about twenty years ago when I was writing an article about the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship for our second issue. While I was researching that article I took a look at the Walnut Valley Festival's archives and saw that Roger had won that contest back in 1979. As the years went by I eventually met most all of the individuals who had won the National Flatpicking Championship, but I'd not run across Roger. I thought that maybe he was one of those guys that had given up music and moved on to other things. It wasn't until I met Roger's ex-wife Lynne Ferguson at a festival that I discovered that Roger was still very actively involved in the music scene up in the Pacific Northwest. I eventually did meet Roger, heard his incredible guitar work, and have been trying to feature him ever since.

Although Roger's home town of Port Orchard, Washington, is a long way from the heartland of old-time and bluegrass music, Roger grew up surrounded by this music. He said, "My Dad played the guitar, fiddle, and mandolin and both my mom and uncles played the guitar and sang. Music was always around. When I was about twelve years old my Dad's friend gave him a mandolin and he told me and my brother that the first one to learn how to play it could have it. I had always loved music. I learned to play the recorder in school and I was probably one of the only kids who took the pamphlet home during the summer and learned how to play all of the tunes."

Although Roger's dad taught him how to play the mandolin, Roger said, "Dad didn't sit me down and make me practice. He had me come to him. I had to ask. He was a good teacher, but we only had one mandolin. He would play something and then pass the mandolin to me and I'd have to play it back. I felt like I had to really focus and learn quickly before he took the mandolin back to show me the next part. So I paid attention." Roger remembers learning tunes like "Flop-Eared Mule," and "Liberty" and said that he built a repertoire of 30 to 40 tunes fairly quickly.



Now 58 years old, Roger grew up during the 1960s when most kids his age were listening to rock and roll. So I asked if he every wanted to learn to play rock music when he was a kid. He said, "No, I only wanted to learn bluegrass. I was pretty hard core about it. I remember telling people that bluegrass was the only good music. When I was a kid I even carved a sign that said bluegrass and had all of the instruments carved in it as well." Roger's parents were bluegrass fans and listened to Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs, and the Stanley Brothers recordings at home.

By the time Roger was fourteen he had started learning how to play the guitar. He said, "I started putting all of my mandolin tunes on the guitar. I hadn't heard anyone play the guitar like that before, so I thought that I had invented flatpicking!" A short while later he was listening to a bluegrass radio program on KRAB radio and heard Doc Watson play "Black Mountain Rag." He said, "I heard Doc and I thought, 'Who is this guy!' I'd never heard anything like that before." KRAB had a bluegrass show every Saturday night from 10 pm to 2 am. Roger bought blank cassette tapes and record the show every weekend. He said, "I recently converted 60 hours of programming from that show in the 1970's from those old cassette tapes to a digital format."

Roger's first performances were backing up his dad at old-time fiddler events. He said, "Once I learned how to play the guitar I became a rhythm slave. My dad would want to play and he'd say, 'Go get your guitar!'"



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When we would be at a fiddle festival or contest and he's say, 'Let's get up on stage and play one of our songs.'" Roger recalls that when he was a kid and would have friends spend the night he'd have to warn them, "Don't be surprised if my dad comes in later and wants me to get up and pick with him." Roger said that many times when his dad went out to a show or jam session, he'd bring friends back to the house for a very late night jam and he'd then wake up Roger and ask him to participate.

When Roger backed up his dad playing fiddle tunes, he never used a capo so he wasn't too familiar with the device. In about 1974 he was attending the Northwest Folk Life Festival in Seattle and Dudley Hill asked Roger if he would like to get up on stage and pick "Black Mountain Rag" with him. Roger remembers, "I had learned how to play the song from Doc's recording in the key of D without a capo. When I got on stage with Dudley, I saw that he used a capo on the second fret and played it out of a C position. It looked so much easier that way!"

During 1973 to 1974 Roger broadened his musical horizons and started performing and recording with a group called the Curly Creek String Band. But in 1975 his family moved to San Diego, California, because his dad had found a good job down there. Tragically, his father was killed in a car accident in San Diego, so his mother moved the family back to Washington after having spent just nine months in southern California. Upon his return to the Seattle area, Roger started performing duo shows with Mark O'Connor and he was able to start attending Olympia College to study music.

Roger recalls, "Mark and I were playing fiddle tunes, but we were also playing swing stuff like 'My Satin Doll,' and 'Take the A-Train.' We were also getting into some of the Grisman stuff. I was studying jazz guitar in school, so I was learning all of the chords to use when I played jazz with Mark." Studying jazz at Olympia College also lead to a long-term teaching position at the college. Roger explained, "I started studying jazz guitar in college in 1977. I was also playing in a few local bluegrass bands. In 1978 the guy who taught the folk guitar class at the college left and they asked me if I would teach that class." Although he did take a short hiatus from teaching that class when he was raising his children, Roger still teaches that folk guitar class at Olympia College today.

Although he played music with his family and has always been active in bands, Roger said that he has never been a contest player. He heard about the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship from Mark O'Connor because one year he participated in a benefit concert that was used to raise money to send Mark to the contest. [Mark won the guitar contest at the Walnut Valley Festival in 1975 and 1977 and he won the fiddle contest in 1974 and 1977.] Roger said, "One day when I was at Mark's home playing music with him, his mother said, 'Mark don't you think that Roger would have a chance to win the guitar contest at Winfield?' I had another friend from Missouri, Ernie Bishop who had moved to Washington from Missouri who also told me that he thought that I had a chance to win that contest. I didn't like competing. That is not why I learned to play music. But I thought I'd give it a shot, so I went there in 1979." The only guitar contest that Roger had ever entered was the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship and he won!

Roger, who was twenty-two when he traveled to Kansas to compete in the National Championship, remembers arriving at his hotel in Winfield and while he was unloading the car he saw a young teenage kid leaning up against a car in the parking lot "picking like a maniac." Roger said, "I saw this young kid picking like that and I thought, 'How many of them are there around here?' It affected my confidence. I didn't listen to any of the other contestants when I arrived at the contest. I was number 19 and I had someone come and find me when it was my turn to play." It turns out that the young kid was a 13 or 14-year-old Allen Shadd, who would go on to win the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship twice (1997 and 2003). Roger said, "A few years ago Allen reached out to me on The Flatpicking Guitar Network and said, 'Hey, do you remember me?' He told me that later that day he had come and listened at the door of my hotel room to hear me practice."

From about 1983 through 2003 Roger preformed with his wife, Lynne Ferguson, as they raised five kids together. They performed and recorded as a duo under the name Double Stop. During that time frame the husband and wife duo recorded eight CDs together (two produced by Mark O'Connor). Roger played mandolin, guitar, and fiddle while Lynne sang and played rhythm guitar. Regarding the duo, Lynne's website states, "For nearly twenty years they performed their own blend

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of acoustic Americana—folk, country, bluegrass, blues, swing—in venues as varied as Nashville recording studios, convention centers, college campuses, fairs, resorts, clubs, and coffee houses. They have taught music, written and recorded music for PBS documentaries, played folk and blues night clubs, and added others to the duo performing as a top 40 country band in country dance clubs around the Puget Sound area.” The duo made over 2000 appearances and had the opportunity to open for such acts as Doc Watson, Taj Mahal, and Emmylou Harris. Although no longer married, Roger and Lynne still occasionally perform together.

In addition to performing with his wife, Roger has performed with many Bluegrass, folk, Americana, swing, jazz, and country bands. Most notably, Roger toured nationally for two years with a Texas-based country band, The Shoppe, in the early 1980s. Roger played acoustic and electric guitar, mandolin, and fiddle while he was with that band. The band regularly opened shows for country music legends such as Merle Haggard, Doug Kershaw, and Emmylou Harris.

Over the years Roger has done a lot of teaching. As mentioned previously, he still teaches group and private lessons at Olympia College, but he also teaches out of his home studio and he teaches “Raise the Bar” pub classes at the Hare & Hounds in Poulsbo, Washington, and at Bainbridge Island’s Pegasus Coffee House. Roger even convinced the administration at the college to facilitate credited Skype lessons. If you are a Washington state resident you can take Roger’s Skype class and earn college credit.

Roger also teaches private lessons through Skype that are not affiliated with the college. For more information about Roger’s classes, both through the college and outside of the college, visit Roger’s website at <http://bainbridgemusic.com>. Also, watch for Roger’s name to appear on the teaching roster of many of the west coast summer music camps. In the past he has taught at camps such as the California Coast Music Camp and the Puget Sound Guitar Workshop.

In addition to performing and teaching, Roger owns a recording studio and has participated in many recorded projects over the years. The studio bio on his website states, “Roger has written and recorded for numerous nationally televised programs, documentaries and television series, many of which have won Emmy or International

Telly awards for their musical scores. His instrumental compositions can be heard on many PBS productions, most notably; *Over America*, *Great Ranches of the West* (w/ Michael Martin Murphy), *Who Cares For the Children* (w/Rhea Perlman) *Nuclear Legacy*, *Over Washington*, and *America’s Historic Trails* (w/ Tom Bodett). Audio-post clients include PBS, Boeing, Wilcox Farms, Suquamish Tribe, Washington Thoroughbred Association, and BBC.” *Over Washington* was the winner of seven Northwest Regional Emmy Awards and is the most successful regional PBS video ever produced. Additionally, Roger has taught audio engineering classes at Olympic College and has contributed too many various other CD projects to mention in this article.

Although he has recorded, engineered, produced, and played on many projects, Roger has not yet released a CD under his own name. However, he is getting ready to do that in the spring of 2016. The tentative title of the recording is *Whiskey Twist*, due to Roger’s twisted arrangement of ‘Whiskey Before Breakfast’. He said, “I play fiddle, mandolin, and guitar on the recording, but it is heavy on flatpicking.” He said the CD is mostly traditional music, but he is also including a few original tunes.

One of the tunes that will be on the recording is “Big Sciota.” Roger recorded and tabbed out a version of this tune for this issue of the magazine, although this is not the exact version that will appear on his CD. Roger said, “What I recorded for the magazine just has the guitar. On the CD I will also include the mandolin, fiddle, and bass.” Currently Roger’s main guitar is a Larrivee that he has owned since 1980. He also has owned a Rod Shenck guitar for about six years and for about two years he played a Roy Noble guitar.

Roger Ferguson is one of those extremely talented musicians and highly skilled flatpickers that you may not have heard of if you live outside of the Pacific Northwest. If you have not been aware of his playing and/or teaching, I’m happy that we have finally had the opportunity to introduce you to him. If you are interested in Skype lessons with a teacher/player of Roger’s caliber, I recommend that you contact him through his website. Also, be sure to check his web site for news about the release of his new CD. Roger has told me that it should be ready by the time this issue reaches subscribers in early March. Be sure to check it out!



Big Sciota

Arranged by Roger Ferguson

G D G G D G

5 G C D G

9 G D G G D G G

14 C D G G D

19 D C C Em D

BigSciota (con't)

24 **G G D D C**

29 **C Em D G G D**

34 **G G D G G C**

39 **D G G D G G D**

44 **G G C D G**

Big Sciota (con't)

49

G D D C C

54

Em D G G D

59

D C C Em D

64

G G D G G D G

69

G C D G G D

Big Sciota (con't)

74

G G D G G C

79

D G G D D

84

C C Em D G

89

G D D Em

93

Em C D D G