

*‘Playing with friends is
what music is all about.
It’s the purest form
of communication
I know ...’*

— Artie Traum

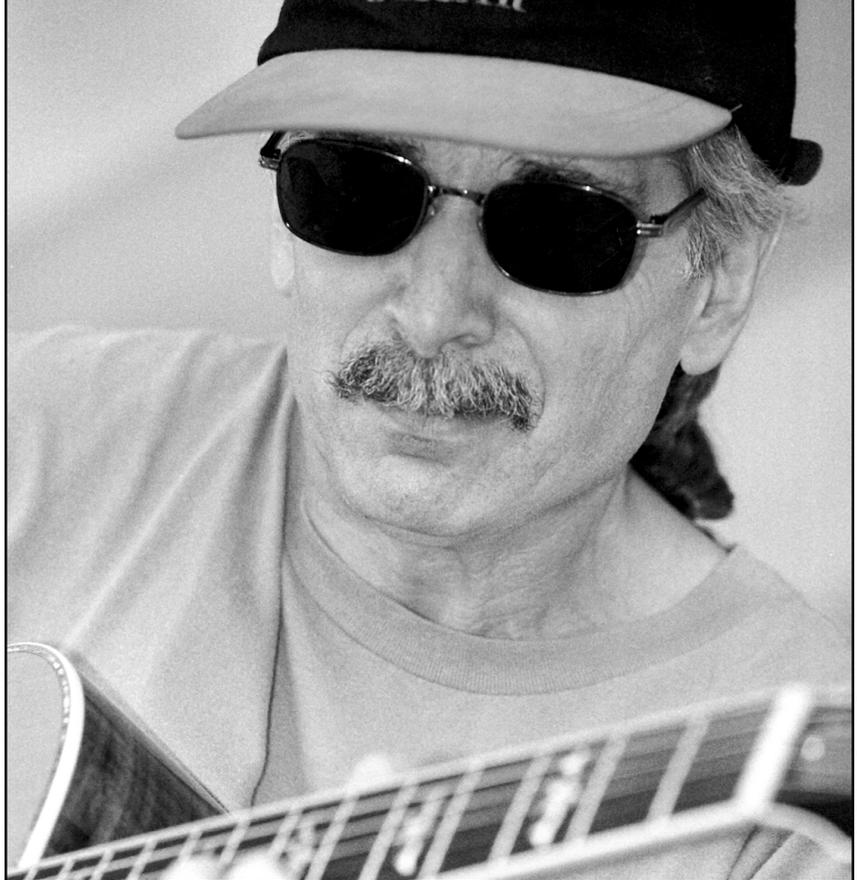


Photo by Robert Corwin ©

ARTIE TRAUM: *Changing Partners, Changing Times*

BY ROGER DEITZ

Since the advent of the Folk Revival, only a select group of folk performers have been considered genuine instrumentalists: artists recognized for superior musicianship, or inventive, precise fretwork. Artie Traum is one of these true guitar masters. From his first appearance on the Greenwich Village folk scene in the early 1960s, and for nearly four decades, the terms “brilliant guitarist” and “musician’s musician” have been consistently and correctly applied to Traum. Although his current offering on Narada, *Meetings With Remarkable Friends*, seems a departure from the coffeehouse music many associate with his early performing and recording days, once aware of Traum’s musical odyssey and his philosophy of playing, it doesn’t seem such a far reach at all.

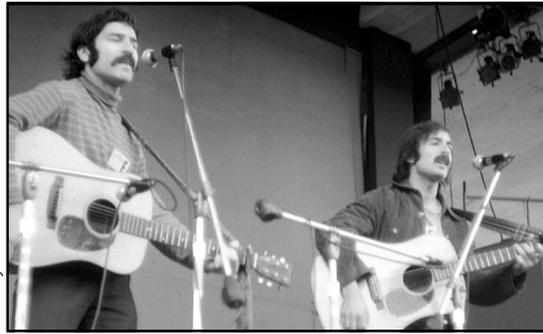
In the 1950s, as young New York City natives, Artie and his older brother Happy were intrigued by the new urban music being made by folks like Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. Artie was born in 1943, Happy preceded him in 1939. Both siblings’ taste ran to roots music, being very much inspired by traditional blues. Happy and Artie naturally gravitated to Washington Square Park in The West Village and to all the exciting new music floating about that had a revivalist and political edge to it. Happy admired and hung out with pickers like Tom Paley and Eric Weissberg, and became a student of Brownie McGhee. For his part, Happy began to build a reputation as a premier player, enthusiastic student and expert teacher. In time, Artie’s older brother was performing with the New World Singers (along with Gil Turner, Bob Cohen and Dee Dixon) and, by the early 1960s, writing for a little magazine named *Sing Out!* Before long, Happy had authored a number of very popular instructional books, and in 1968 even took on the job of editor at *Sing Out!* Artie, on the other hand, listened to the same artists, but was by

SING OUT! SPOTLIGHT

nature more restless and eclectic. He too liked the blues, but was also heavily into jazz and not adverse to dabbling in rock and pop. Both brothers became popular studio recording session players, Artie backing up the likes of John Sebastian and the Lovin' Spoonful, David Sanos, Jean Ritchie and Judy Roderick. From the beginning, the younger Traum liked to experiment and push himself to grow musically.

Folk purists prefer to remember the brothers Traum frozen in some comfy time warp of those halcyon, post-Weavers days in the late 1960s, when they teamed up to become one of the classic contemporary folk acts performing at festivals and clubs around the globe. Was it ever thus? Artie muses, "The reality is, when I started out, although I was greatly influenced by Happy and the music he brought back to our home, which was basically music by Pete Seeger, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry ... regardless of the fact that I loved that stuff and was very much drawn to it ... at the same time, I had other musical interests. My earliest memories of music that I loved included Jim Hall, The Modern Jazz Quartet, John Coltrane, Albert King, Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters and all kinds of other stuff. Still, the only thing I ever thought I could play was folk music. This idea was clearly imprinted in my head because I somehow thought, 'Folk music isn't that hard, I can probably fake it.' The reason for believing that is I'd go to Pete Seeger concerts at Carnegie Hall, where Pete made you feel this was the people's music ... that you could pick up a banjo and just play in your living room. I look to Pete Seeger with awe and acknowledge that he is a very astute and accomplished musician, but, when I was 15-, 16- and 17-years old, I was drawn to folk music mostly because it seemed to be relatively easy to perform."

Artie adds that he was always into modern jazz and "Bebop stuff." He listened avidly, and tried to pick up "a few tips here and there on improvisation," so that what he did, "always went a little beyond the folk world." It wouldn't be until ten years ago, with the advent of his album *Cayenne*, that he finally made a leap from being a self-professed "singer-songwriter folkie," to becoming a full-time acoustic instrumentalist. "I didn't



Happy (L) and Artie Traum at the Newport Folk Festival in 1969.

know that I would continue to be an instrumental artist," recalls Traum, "but, it was an important first step. I just thought, 'I never really liked singing too much, I don't think I'm a very good singer, so maybe I should make the guitar my voice.'" A few years later, *Letters From Joubé* became a #1 radio hit (Gavin AA chart) for 6 weeks and the second-most-played "Smooth Jazz" album of 1995. Traum laughs, "It put me in the elevator and onto the Weather Channel." The album featured collaborations with Tony Levin, Scott Petito, Warren Bernhardt and others. A cast of these three and 21 other musicians and singers returned for *The View From Here* in 1996.

Collaborations are what Artie Traum is most noted for. He has always had a knack for forming great, complimentary partnerships. At first, he distinguished himself working with the True Endeavor Jug Band, recording with them in 1963. Jug Band music was all the rage, yet True Endeavor had a blues edge to it. That is no surprise, given the fact that in addition to Danny Kalb, it contained blues scholar Sam Charters and Artie Rose. Later Traum worked with the blues-rock outfit The Danny Kalb Quartet, which subsequently evolved into the legendary Blues Project. By the late sixties, Happy and Artie inaugurated a performing partnership. Their big break came playing the 1968 Newport Folk Festival and other high profile events like The Philadelphia Folk Festival and Bob and Evelyn Beers' Fox Hollow Festival near Albany, N.Y. Happy and Artie went on to tour extensively for about eight years, opening for top rock and pop acts like Seatrain and the Butterfield Blues Band. In the early seventies, the duo inked a management contract with Albert Grossman, which led to a recording deal with Capitol Records. This resulted in the release of two distin-

guished albums, *Happy And Artie Traum* and *Double-Back*, which showcased their guitar-based music. The seeds of collaborations yet to come were already sewn when Happy had moved to Woodstock, N.Y. in 1967. Artie followed a few years later. John Herald of the Greenbriar Boys was a resident

there. So too, was banjo player Billy Faier. Grossman's stable of clients, including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, were often hanging about in places like the Café Espresso. The mystique of the region continued to grow with the advent of a seminal Woodstock Music and Arts Fair of August, 1969, featuring "3 Days of Peace and Music."

By 1972, the collection of Woodstock personages grew, and neighborhood jam sessions led to the Rounder recording of *Mud Acres: Music Among Friends*, followed by *More From Mud Acres: Woodstock Mountains* in 1977, presenting contemporary, traditional and original songs and instrumental work. The circle of friends included Maria Muldaur, John Herald, Bill Keith, Pat Alger, Jim Rooney, Rory Block, Eric Andersen and John Sebastian, known collectively as The Woodstock Mountain Review.

In 1981, Artie teamed with Nashville-based songwriter Pat Alger to record a critically acclaimed album, *From The Heart*. Other noteworthy endeavors included Artie's co-host work with Happy on the *Bring It On Home* radio program on WAMC radio, the NPR affiliate in Albany, N.Y., which ran forty shows over five years (1988-1992) and hosted some of the finest in acoustic music from the most notable touring artists. The program's archives were accessed for a series of CDs released by Sony/Legacy. Also during this period, Traum began a side career, producing a number of albums including Livingston Taylor's *Life Is Good*.

Artie Traum's recently released debut album on Narada, *Meetings With Remarkable Friends*, once again stirs a cauldron of talent and makes magic from a collaborative brew. This one is even more a jazz effort, with many folk and rock personages showing that they too believe in ex-

ploring the genre. Some of the remarkable friends include The Band (Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson), David Grisman and Béla Fleck. Artie says this

project has been another growth experience, in part because he found “every tune had a different dynamic and every artist a different personality.” Rather than make

the collaborators bend to his will, he wanted to grow towards the things that they brought to the mix, just as he had done countless times before, with other buddies. He reflects, “I think there’s a theme that runs through my life: hanging out with friends. The only difference in this project was the level and amount of eclectic material I had to write and bring to the table.”

Traum also offers advice. “First,” he observes, “there is so much noise out there, so much extraneous music product continually pouring into the marketplace, that I would suggest to people, not to put something out unless they have something to say. They should be careful about the messages of their songs and the level of their instrumental work, as well as the production and musicality. CDs have become people’s business cards, which is fine, but more care should be taken with artistic statements. There are a lot of singer-songwriters who don’t seem to have a whole lot to say and I think they need to go back and study great writers like Pat Alger, Carole King and James Taylor, and listen to the craft of their songs. I personally would like to hear more topical music.”

Narada has put Traum in charge of producing a new series called, “Masters of the Acoustic Guitar.” The first is with Laurence Juber and the second with Canadian guitarist Don Ross. “These are people who know what they need to do, they make producing very easy,” Traum reports. He has also completed producing *Chez Cajun* with Michael Doucet, Cindy Cashdollar, and Balfa Toujours. Looking at all his current projects he suggests, “I like to get the best performances out of performers – rather than impose my stamp on them.” In saying so, Artie puts his finger on the essence of his contribution to all his collaborations. With ever changing partners, Artie Traum always has had a knack for honoring his associates with a very personal and professional contribution that makes the partnership just that much better.

Roger Deitz is a regular contributor to these pages, as well as an accomplished singer, songwriter and musician in his own right.

DISCOGRAPHY

Meetings with Remarkable Friends, 1999, Narada #46957

The View From Here, 1996, Shanachie #5016

Letters From Joubee, 1993, Shanachie #5008

Cayenne, 1987, Rounder #3084

From The Heart (w/ Pat Alger), 1980, Rounder #3039 (o-o-p)

Life On Earth, 1977, Rounder #3014 (o-o-p)

• with **The Woodstock Mountains Revue:**

Live at The Bearsville Theater Vol.2, 1990, Village Green #74 (Japan)

Live at The Bearsville Theater Vol.1, 1990, Village Green #73 (Japan)

Woodstock Mountains: Music From Mud Acres, 1995, Rounder #11520
(CD compilation from the first four WMR releases noted below)

Back To Mud Acres, 1981, Rounder #3065 (cassette only)

Pretty Lucky, 1978, Rounder #3025 (o-o-p)

More Music From Mud Acres, 1977, Rounder #3018 (o-o-p)

Mud Acres: Music Among Friends, 1974, Rounder #3001 (cassette only)

• with **Happy & Artie Traum:**

The Test Of Time, 1993, Roaring Stream #201

Hard Times In The Country, 1975, Rounder #3007 (o-o-p)

Happy & Artie Traum / Double-Back, Import 2-fer reissue, Vivid #534 (Japan)

Double-Back, 1971, Capitol #799 (o-o-p)

Happy & Artie Traum, 1969, Capitol #586 (o-o-p)

• with **Bear** (w/Eric Kaz, Steve Soles, Skip Boone & Darius Davenport):

Greetings, Children Of Paradise, 1968, Verve Forecast #3059 (o-o-p)

• with **True Endeavor Jug Band** (w/Danny Kalb, Artie Rose, Sam & Ann Charters and Sita Dimitroff):

The Art Of The Jug Band, 1963, Prestige #14022 (o-o-p, three tracks from this release are included on **The Prestige/Folklore Years: Volume Three**, Prestige/Folklore #9903)

• **Happy & Artie** also appear on (and host) the **Bring It On Home** compilations, **Vol. 1** (Sony Legacy #52997) and **Vol. 2** (Sony Legacy #52998), both 1994.

• **Artie** has also done a number of instructional recordings for Homespun Tapes including: Videos **Guitar Accompaniment** (VD-ART-GT01) & **Guitar Chord Magic** (2 tapes, VD-ART-MA01 & VD-ART-MA02); Audio Cassettes **Basic Jazz Guitar** (AD-ART-JZ), **Hot Licks For Guitar** (AD-ART-HG) & **Lead Guitar** (AD-ART-LD); and CDs **Essential Chords & Progressions for Acoustic Guitar** (CDZ-AT01) & **101 Essential Riffs** (CDZ-AT02).

CONTACTS

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www.homespuntapes.com. **Narada**, 4650 N. Port Washington Road, Milwaukee, WI 53212-1063; Ph: 800-966-3699; E-mail: friends@narada.com; Web:

www.narada.com. **Village Green**, Pony Canyon, 3-5 Kudan-kita 3-chome,

Choyoda-ku, Tokyo 102 Japan. **Prestige/Folklore**, dist. by Fantasy, Tenth &

Parker, Berkeley, CA 94710. **Roaring Stream**, P.O. Box 599, Woodstock, NY

12498; E-mail: roarstream@aol.com. **Rounder**, One Camp St., Cambridge, MA

02140; Ph: 800-768-6337; E-mail: info@rounder.com; Web: www.rounder.com.

Shanachie, 13 Laight Street, New York, NY 10013; Ph: 800-497-1043; E-mail:

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Ave., New York, NY 10022-3211; Ph: 212-833-8000. **Vivid**, ???.

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