



A Misty River Rising
by Billy Lloyd Hulst

"Playing" music they call it. But as any working musician knows it takes a lot of work to "play". There are gigs and then there are gigs. Playing an open sided gazebo in Waterfront Park during Rose Festival, which means it's cold, windy and raining, it is after all June in Oregon, at noon, is no one's idea of "playing". How I came to find myself there is really none of your business, let's say I was looking for a friend. But as I wandered through the endless booths and displays of things I have long since lost interest in, looking for a dry place to drink my coffee and smoke a cigarette, I came upon the aforementioned gazebo, where a band was setting up. I found a plastic chair out of the downpour and watched a depressing scene I had taken part in so many times. Outside in bad weather playing to people eating cotton candy and corn dogs. Not exactly the gig from hell but certainly mentioned in Dante's long lost book on the suffering of artists. The musicians seemed to be familiar with the dues paying part of the deal, and after getting levels set they looked around at each other and started it off. The guitar player, a grown up woman named Carol Harley, played simple traditional rhythm keeping the chords coming while she looked out at the weather. Her smile seemed to say, "Well, I've had a baby, I've changed diapers, I can handle this." Beside her was another woman, young enough to be Carol's daughter, named Dana Abel, on accordion, and she was, again playing the simple traditional, high quality, nothing fancy, nothing wasted style. Beside her was Laura Quigley, who is not only young enough to be, but in fact is Carol Harley's daughter. She was playing bass with skill belying her age. Her animated face was quick to smile or scrunch up while working through a change, and mostly showing that she was doing that, oh so, important task of listening to the whole band. The last musician was Chris Kokesh, she was playing violin and would pick up a guitar occasionally. During the quick sound check on her guitar she had played the introduction to "One More Dollar", a song that Spud taught our band. I wanted to hear their arrangement. No, it wasn't all that altruistic I admit, these were four very attractive and talented women, and they sing that harmony that women alone can do. The one that men would be wise to listen to very carefully. Individually they take the lead vocal duties and each is unto herself enique, in range and phrasing. You could call this a 'four piece country chick band' but you would be stupid if you did. I bought their new CD "Rising" when they were finished and noticed that they had 'guests' like Glen Moore, a legendary Oregon jazz bass player, and mandolinist John Reichman, as well as other local 'pros' sitting in. They play the kind of music that I've heard called "Americana" a mixture of acoustic folk, bluegrass, celtic, rock and jazz. Chris's original songs are very different from the 'oh, baby, come home to Momma' of traditional country, but not the often bitter feminist rants of some 'grrrl' bands. Her song, "Real as a Dream" tells of a relationship gone bad and ends with the lines "You on your white horse, made for the sunset, you and your princess bride. Is this the end of the story, I fight the dragons, you get the glory." Dana's original, "This American Dream", talks with compassion about a husband and father working his way out of poverty only to find that, "the things money can't buy are lacking in my life."

What really struck me on that rainy morning on the banks of the Willamette was not just that they were troopers, but that they were working hard to make the music their own. The voices could be compared favorably to Emmy Lou Harris, Joan Baez, Linda Ronstadt, or Maria Muldaur, but their phrasing, the mix of the words and the harmony, the timing, the full rest, dramatic mixing of what is being sung with how it is being sung adds a jazz flavor that makes their sound different. They are not quite seasoned pros yet, but the beginnings of a band that you will be hearing a lot more about in the future. They are called Misty River and they play around Portland, Oregon and even have a web site; www.mistyriverband.com.

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