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being and my guru in many things. We actually met when he was 12 years old and I was two. My mother was his art teacher — and a big influence on his aesthetic outlook as I later found out — and she brought me into class one day. He turned me on to so much music (everything from Bill Monroe to Charlie Poole to Welsh sea shanties) and was himself a great mandolin player. I was 15 years old when I heard the recordings he made of Clarence Ashley, the old-time banjo player and ballad singer who he rediscovered and of course, Doc Watson who he discovered. Ralph helped organize the Friends of Old-Time Music, which was devoted to bringing rural musicians to urban audiences and also helped run the Newport Festival, ultimately becoming the director of the Smithsonian Folklife Institute before his untimely death in 1994.

**S.Z.:** *When you were 17 years old, the first musician to invite you up on stage to play was Doc Watson. What do you remember about that rendition of "In the Pines"?*

**D.G.:** Not much, but it was very exciting for me to play with a musician of Doc's caliber and "authenticity." Much later, when we toured together in the 1990s we reprised that tune, and a live recording of it is available on "Dawg Plays Big Mon," my tribute to Bill Monroe, available at AcousticOasis.com. Losing Doc this year was very sad for me as I've had a personal and musical relationship with him for over 50 years. He is truly one of the great masters of American music.

**S.Z.:** *You have collaborated with some of the greatest musicians in the world spanning many genres of musical style. What is the importance of collaboration in music?*

**D.G.:** Unless you're playing solo, which I rarely ever do, music is a team sport. To me that's the greatest attribute to the entire art form, the fact that it is collaborative and dependent on the interaction between musicians who develop common artistic goals to realize the artistic intentions of the music. A key element in this is time, not just rhythm-wise but in actual hours, months and years spent in developing a group and musical relationships. Three members of my quintet/sextet have been with me for multiple decades and the Bluegrass Experience has been playing together now in this form for nearly a decade. I've known and played with my friends Andy Statman or Martin Taylor or Frank Vignola for many years now. That time spent really starts to pay off in the way those collaborations sound and getting better all the time.

**S.Z.:** *Acoustic Disc and Acoustic Oasis are*

*remarkable sites - amazing catalogs of some of the greatest musical collaborations. What's the story behind the creation of Acoustic Disc?*

**D.G.:** Acoustic Disc came about in an almost accidental fashion. In 1989 I was under contract with MCA records. They had released (the album) "Mondo Mando" which had originally been recorded for Warner Brothers (how it got to MCA is another story) and "Svingin' with Svend" (with the great Danish jazz violin master Svend Asmussen) and due to its, in their opinion, poor sales, they were hesitant to let me record a new project which I was planning. At the same time I was building my own recording studio (in my garage) and two friends, Artie and Harriet Rose, had just moved to the Bay Area and were looking to start a business. I was fed up with the mainstream record business, and we decided to start our own company with the help of my manager Craig Miller. Although from that point on, I didn't have the benefits of a "major label," I certainly had complete artistic freedom to produce any music that I wanted, but of course, we had to pay for it. Within a year I was back recording with my old friend Jerry Garcia, at his suggestion, and we were in business!

**S.Z.:** *In August, on Jerry Garcia's 70th birthday, you released a hi-def version of the original "Garcia Grisman" album (1991) that was nominated for a Grammy. You also released an alternate album with studio tracks that differ from the original - a lovely tribute for a good friend. Can you tell a favorite tale of yours that exemplifies the spirit of Jerry Garcia as you knew him?*

**D.G.:** After one of our recording sessions, "Decibel Dave" Dennison, our fabulous engineer, accidentally knocked over Jerry's old Martin D-28 guitar and it received a small scrape in the top. Dave felt terrible about it but Jerry had already left. The next time we were together, Dave sheepishly shows Jerry the slight damage, apologizing profusely and offering to pay for any repair costs. Jerry just took his pick out and purposely made a huge scratch down the face of the instrument, just smiled like a Cheshire cat and never said a word. That was Jerry Garcia!

**S.Z.:** *"Old and in the Way" only actually existed for about nine months in the early 1970s, yet the impact of those months has been monumental in bringing bluegrass music to a whole generation of young people then and bringing it to folks of all ages for generations to follow. When you reflect on those nine months, had any of you a sense of what you were a part?*

**D.G.:** "Old and In The Way" was a lot of fun and I was certainly aware of the talent

in that band, but I really had no idea of the impact it would have in creating a wider audience for bluegrass music. At the time we were playing almost exclusively in small local Bay Area venues, and the recording wasn't released until two years after we were no longer playing together.

**S.Z.:** *American musical heritage - Is it being lost or is it being found in today's musical soundscape?*

**D.G.:** That's a great question and one that I think about a lot. I'd say the answer is both — the great American musical heritage is being lost and found! On the negative side, this great heritage of blues, jazz, bluegrass and folk music, all created here in the last century, receives little or no exposure or positive reinforcement from the mainstream media. On the other hand, more of this material is readily available than ever before. It's now possible to obtain the complete recordings of everything from Louis Armstrong to the Carter Family to Bill Monroe to John Coltrane, almost instantly and there are many talented young musicians who are capably carrying on these great traditions as well. The problem is that John Q. Public is being brainwashed on a daily basis with gaga music or whatever it is that big corporations peddle on TV, so there is little chance that most of those folks might suspect that there is something better. I try to do my part, but I'm afraid without mainstream exposure, we may be losing this cultural battle.

**S.Z.:** *In November, both Colorado and Washington state voters passed referendums to decriminalize pot. And Connecticut and Massachusetts joined 16 other states and Washington D.C., when they passed medical marijuana legislation. You have your medical marijuana card, grow your own pot in your backyard and are coming up on 50 years of smoking. What are your thoughts about the decriminalization of marijuana?*

**D.G.:** We're moving to Washington! What's up with Oregon?

**S.Z.:** *You will be playing two shows at the Alberta Rose Theater to ring in the new year with the kind folks of Portland. For those of us planning to be at the show, what can we expect?*

**D.G.:** The Bluegrass Experience is looking forward to welcoming in the new year with some high powered traditional bluegrass. We'll be playing some of our greatest hits and debuting a whole bunch of material that we've been working up for a Doc Watson tribute recording project to be recorded first thing next year. We hope y'all can come out and join us there.

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