

## INTERVIEW WITH THE FLYING SALVIAS ~ TWO MUSIC PROS, ONE HOPPING CD

Jean Bartlett

10.24.2017

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It only took one listen to The Flying Salvias "The Nature of Things," to know this is the kind of record that Emmylou Harris, Western swing makers Vince Gill and the Time Jumpers, and the late tango composer legend Astor Piazzolla – if he were still alive – would all put on their turntables if they caught a listen to just one of the 100 radio stations playing it across the U.S. It's that good and not one of the aforementioned legends got to be where they are without appreciating good music. Every listener is going to hear the kind of musicianship, vocals and lyrics that used to send people rushing to record stores to pick up "that" record.



The album opens with "Broke Boogie" and it has got a lot to offer, including: brush drums, dapper cow-barn fiddle, kiss vocals (that would be Henry and Kathleen weaving in clear, whisper harmonies), and smart lyrics that tickle with reality. "Not a Prayer" is Blue Ridge Mountain swing with Kathleen whirling her lyricist's baton like a modern-day troubadour. "Won't it be fine," she writes and sings, "When it's Armageddon time?" This song, like many of their songs, ponders today's questions driven by music that sings. "Big Old Yellow Metal Thing" is a nice little environmental-awareness tango. Then there is: "Oh, Wayne." This song gets five stars for so many reasons, including: 1) the name "Wayne" is the headline; 2) the music is gypsy French cafe accordion meets country swing; and 3) in the midst of, once again, clever lyrics that include "I think you're working on your Karmann Ghia, I want to knock but it's not a good i-de-a," it tugs on your heart strings with thoughts of those who've gone to war. Additionally among the listens are a gospel swing and a gentle prairie shuffle. But really, at the heart of this record is a convertible ride along the roads of the American dream – dreams filled with hope, with worry and with a fighting spirit to do better. It doesn't proselytize. It's too good of a listen for that. The music, all performed by professional musicians who love what they do because they are so darn good at it, sweeps in like the comfort of remembrance. You're going to hear landmark piano, pulp bass, river-crafted guitar, drums and percussion that both call and sway, and fiddle that leads you over the hill to a cozy wood fireside. Season that with wordsmith lyrics that have got things to say, songbird singing and fun – so much fun. It's the kind of magic that only happens when great artists collide.

## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 2)

Pacifica's Chit-Chat Cafe on Manor set the scene for the interview with this husband and wife. The tony little spot is a bedrock for good musicianship and these two longtime musicians carry hefty résumés. **Kathleen**. She sings, plays guitar and writes lyrics and melodies. In 1982, she co-founded the new wave band The Rayons. Before that she was in Full Speed Ahead, which was all about country-rock. She was a founding member of the Incredible 60's Rock and Soul Review (IRS). She sang with the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir. **Henry**. He plays piano/keyboards, accordion, occasionally guitar, and weighs in on vocals. He composes and arranges. He was a founding member of the jump-swing band, Johnny Nocturne. He played in the country-rock band, The Rounders. He currently also plays in The Jones Gang – an all roads highway Americana band that "rose from the ashes" of the group Houston Jones. They met back in Kathleen's IRS band days. Henry was invited to sit in with the band. One year later, both were members of the blues-rock Americana band, The Hurricanes, and love and art came together like a bolt of uncompromising beautiful music history. They've been together since.



**The Hurricanes**, clockwise from top left: Henry, John Firmin, Eric Mossberger, Kathleen, Dave Golia and Jeff Stratton, Circa 1990.



**The Ray Price Club**, clockwise from far left: Dave Golia, Henry, Peter Tucker, Joe Goldmark, Kathi Kamen Goldmark and Kathleen. Circa 1989.

## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 3)

The two musicians had day jobs; all done now. She worked with nonprofits. He worked as a manufacturing software engineer. But Kathleen pretty much explained what drives them as artists when she answered this. "So, you woke up one morning and realized that 'The Nature of Things' needed to come out of your head?"

"More like we woke up one morning many, many years ago and knew we needed to make music or die," Kathleen said. "We've been swimming upstream ever since."

This is their third CD. The first was a "country-rocker" called "Kathy N. Right – Long Way Around." That came out in 1994. There's a story in there as to why they waited until 2012 to release their next CD, "Curious Bling." But they're saving that for the big book, should they ever write it. ("Curious Bling" has played my car CD player more times than you can shake a stick at.) As to "The Nature of Things," they started writing it before "Curious Bling" got out of the recording studio.

"We knew we wanted an acoustic record that was piano-centric, which is kind of unusual for Americana and folk music," Kathleen noted. "I guess the purposeful inspiration for the record as a whole was to embrace or even create, a particular style and still be able to jump all over the place."

The Flying Salvias describe their music as, "A piano/vocal and sometimes guitar duo, playing signature Ameri-kind-uh music which blends: country, pop, blues, beatnik jazz, swing, and old hippy – though not usually all in the same song." I'd add in there: "A clear, spot-on vocalist, Kathleen can climb anywhere the notes take her with a phrasing and technique that falls like heaven on the ears, even when she's roaring strictly rock 'n' roll. As to Henry, undoubtedly his mom dropped jaws when she told everyone that her son was born with an accordion and a piano in his hands. But really, there's no other way to explain his matter-of-course music ingenuity."

Along with Kathleen and Henry, "The Nature of Things" features: Travis Jones, acoustic guitar and vocals; Joe Craven, mandolin and fiddle; Mike Anderson on doghouse bass; and Russ Gold on drums and percussion. The Jordan Airheads contribute backing vocals on the song "Polonius Funk." Legends all, give them a Google.

"With this record we were going for a swiny, almost gypsy-jazzish yet homespun feel," Kathleen explained. "So we picked people to play with that we knew could do that."

Kathleen writes the lyrics and the melody. "I do write those," she noted, "but Henry has been known to provide crucial *bon mots* and couplets when I am stuck. Also, the music he comes up with frequently guides the melody. He has a way of taking my 3-chord mentality to the next level."

"Most of the time, Kathleen plays me a song and I try to figure out how to accompany her," Henry said, highlighting "The Other Side" and "Rosemary" as examples. "Occasionally I throw in a phrase or create a bridge to break up all the verses. Less often she sings me a melody and I have to come up with the rest – 'Big Old Yellow Metal Thing,' 'Sweet Little You.' But it's mostly her."

They started recording their album in March of 2017 and released it in August. Both agree the experience was, "A blast!"

All songs are written by Kathleen Enright Salvia and Henry Salvia, except track 8: "Magnolia Hart." That one is Kathleen and former bandmate Kathi Kamen Goldmark.

"The song 'Magnolia Hart' came from the archives," Kathleen said. "We recorded it along with all the others but thought maybe we should save it for a country album. Then we listened to people smarter than us, so it made the cut after all. Kathi wrote a book, 'My Shoes Keep Walking Back to You,' back in 2002. It's about a country music back-up singer who becomes a star. She used a lot of my lyrics in the book but she also needed a new song with the title 'Magnolia Hart' for the project. We were scheduled to work on it together, but literally the night before, the words came to me in my sleep. I woke up, wrote the lyrics out, went over to her house and fortunately she wasn't mad that I started without her! She liked the lyrics and we proceeded to hammer out the music."

"Kathi was definitely a unique individual," Kathleen continued. "She believed anyone could sing and the jam she started over 30 years ago is still taking place today. It's run by Los Train Wreck, the second Tuesday of every month at The El Rio in San Francisco. She also had a successful business shepherding authors on their book tours through



## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 4)

town, which ultimately led to the creation of The Rock Bottom Remainders, a band of wannabe rock stars but already author stars, with people like Stephen King, Amy Tan, Ridley Pearson and Dave Barry. A song Kathi and I wrote together, 'Older Than Him (alias The Slut Song),' became one of their signature songs. They invited me to sing it with them at one of their book industry concerts right after Kathi passed away. Her ashes were in a little urn in Amy Tan's dog carrier on the stage."

Kathleen and Henry are doing a relaxed record release, sampling out songs within their various gigs throughout the Bay Area. And people are really listening. There is a lot of humor in their songs and the audience frequently ripples with "we get that" chuckles. Both Salvias are funny and smart and they love this.



Jean Bartlett photos

Musicians, husband and wife, Henry and Kathleen Salvia, talk about their music process at Pacifica's Chit-Chat Cafe, October 24, 2017.



## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 5)

What in particular does each Flying Salvia love about this record?

"I love that there are a lot of different grooves that somehow still present a cohesive work," Kathleen noted. "I love Henry's solo on 'The Dinosaur.' I can't talk about my own voice, but I love that you (this interviewer) can understand the words!"

"The cover," Henry answered. "The original title was 'Dig This!' but Maurice Tani – in his secret identity of mild-mannered graphic artist, among other things – said, 'How about this?'" And we both fell in love with it and knew we had to change the title. It took Kathleen about three days to come up with the new title. Way better. I'm very proud of the music and the band. Oh, and the singer, too!"



The Flying Salvias "The Nature of Things," was recorded at OTR Studios in Belmont. Studio founder, owner and engineer Cookie Marengo specializes in recording live acoustic music to 2" tape, then mixing it to DSD digital audio, a high-end audiophile format that requires special hardware/software to play. Cookie's DSD version of "The Nature of Things" is online at [Blue Coast Music](http://BlueCoastMusic.com).

Places where you will find The Flying Salvias delivering their music include: The Chit-Chat Cafe in Pacifica, the San Gregorio General Store, The Cannery Cafe in Hayward, and Bird & Beckett Books and Records in San Francisco. Plus the two can tick off numerous Bay Area places where they pull up a chair to listen, which include all the aforementioned, as well as Rancho Nicasio, plus four more San Francisco hot spots: The Riptide, the 'All Star Jam' with Los Train Wreck at El Rio, Thee Parkside and The Saloon.

## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 6)

"The other band I'm 'in,' The Jones Gang, released a new album 'No Turning Back' in April," Henry said. "I was recording that and the Flying Salvias album at the same time which was complicated!"

Henry also gets called occasionally to record with folks like The Keller Sisters and Joe Goldmark, a local pedal steel legend. Coming up he will play in the pit band for "Honky Tonk Angels," running Thanksgiving to Christmas at the Altarena Playhouse in Alameda

"It's a musical based on what's called 'classic country' songs," Henry noted. "It's about three women who follow their dream of becoming country singers in Nashville."

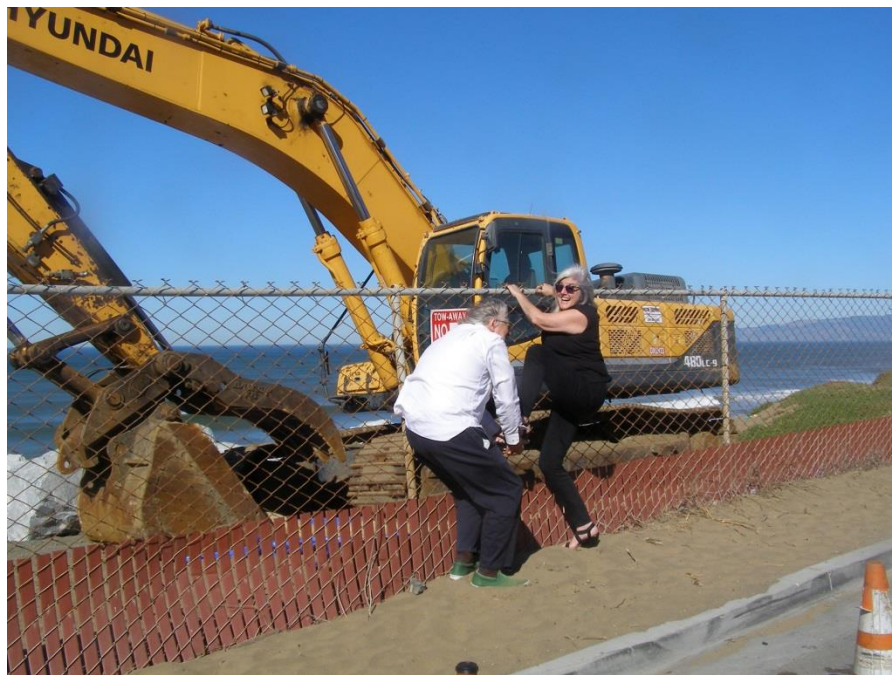
Henry worked with two of the actors, Margaret Belton and Julia Etzel, in a show last year titled "Always, Patsy Cline."

"The story of Calvin Kline's mother Patsy," Henry deadpanned. "I kid! I kid!"

The couple vows they are going to make their next CD electric.

"Also going to try to not write so many five-six minute songs," Kathleen laughed. "And I'm going to see if I can write more songs in major keys and not be so depressing and sarcastic. So far I have a total of one. I may have to have a personality transplant."

Towards the end of the interview it became clear that a big yellow excavator, parked across the street from the beach-side cafe, was clearly a reminder of The Flying Salvias tune "Big Old Yellow Metal Thing." Despite hair-parting winds, we headed out to capture the synchronistic moment.



Jean Bartlett photo

Across the street from the Chit-Chat Cafe was an oceanside disturbance in need of immediate investigation. Flying Salvias, October 24, 2017.

"Henry and I met on the bandstand when he sat in with a band I was in," Kathleen recalled with a smile. "No bells went off. Fast forward to a year later and he walks into a club I was playing. It was like glowing little stars and birdies surrounded him. Then my bass player said, 'You have to get him in our band.' The rest is history. He likes to tell a slightly different story!"

Henry keeps quiet with a knowing grin.



## Portraits & Roots

### Flying Salvias Interview – Two Music Pros, One Hopping CD (page 7)

"But I would say that music is the glue to our relationship. That and the fact that Henry is the kindest, smartest, most talented, most compassionate, yet nastily wry observer, that I know. And then there's our shared love of Manhattans!

"Musically, we have always encouraged each other to try new ideas and to pursue projects that interest us, even if, maybe especially so, that project takes us away from each other, or makes us a little too busy to be home much for a while. We are lucky to be able to keep on growing together even when we are apart. This may sound cloying, but it's true. As to what we hope our listeners get out of this record? A few laughs, a few tears, a few new dance moves."



Photo Jean Bartlett

Just some musicians in a fantastic Ameri-kind-uh band at Pacifica's Chit-Chat Cafe.

The Flying Salvias, website: <https://www.flyingsalvias.com>.



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