

Jim Gaudet  
Albany N.Y.

MUSICAN, STORYTELLER

Jim had always wanted to learn how to play guitar after hearing his favorite artists make original finger picking sounds of their own. So one day he picked up a guitar and taught himself how to play. That one day has lead him to record deals, concerts, and a passionate fan base. His self-taught practice has given him a unique and genuine style that sets him apart from those who go by the books because he only has his own rules to follow.

Inside his house, he keeps a photograph on his shelf of his first night ever performing solo at Caffe Lena in Saratoga Springs. The photograph is a reminder of how far he has come to give him the confidence to keep making music. His home is where he writes the majority of his lyrics, which he could spend anywhere from hours to years editing and perfecting them to his liking. He shares his lyrics with his band, The Railroad Boys, where they then work on the sounds that feel right with the words together.

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it is just an expression of a person.”*

Jim is all about the connection he makes with his audience; to see them smiling, laughing, dancing, and having a good time is when he knows he has succeeded with his performance. This sentiment reflects on his kind-hearted and joyous personality, on the stage and off. He knows the weight of a funny story to bring a smile to one’s face just as well as he knows the weight of one simple small goal and how far it can carry you.



“ I would have recurring dreams. The dream was that I would go over and pick up a guitar and just start finger picking and playing a tune. That was way before I ever could. But now I can. Thank God I got to that level. I am the type of person that really likes to think things through, I am more of a thinker. I have never been confused with someone who makes a knee-jerk reaction. I think too much about things. Even with that I am not a detail guy, it is not like I am thinking about every little detail. I just go off in thought somewhere.

I like to think of myself as a performing songwriter. That is what I do. I have always been interested, influenced in wanting to know who wrote the song. If it were a pop hit, or a folk tune, I have always wanted to know who wrote that. The people that I always respected when I first writing songs are totally unknown people. My big influences in my early days are certainly Bob Dylan. Dylan was a key guy. I can still remember the first time I heard a Dylan tune and it stopped me dead in my tracks. There are songwriters who have done that to me throughout time. I always wanted to know the songwriter and never thought that I could ever be a songwriter, but one thing led to another and I just started giving it a try. I knew then I had to get a guitar and learn how to play a guitar. It was just a crazy thing. But he was singing “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright” and I will never forget it because it stopped me dead in my tracks.

It’s funny because Ed Sheeran covered “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright” and my daughter is a huge fan of his. So she says to me, “Have you ever heard this song?” and I told her, “That’s the song! That’s the one! It got me going.” John Prine is a big influence too. He was the one I felt that when I picked up a guitar that I could duplicate his songs. So he got me going. Loudon Wainwright III he was an influence also, and Randy Newman. But I always went for the guys that of course had great songs, but they didn’t care about their vocals. Are you familiar with Steve Earle? I love Steve Earle. He makes no effort whatsoever to be on the money. His voice is so lazy, but I love it! I love the way he presents, and I love a beautiful voice. I do. I love when it is just an expression of a person.

When you make music or art of any kind, It should be you. It should be only you. You shouldn’t have to try to sound like The Beatles. Don’t be The Beatles. Be you. I get off on this other tangent as far as musicianship. I have never read, I have never taken a lesson. I have never done any of the things musically like that. So I have a very distinct presentation on my guitar. It is very rhythmic, percussive and for people that are classical trained, I have the utmost respect for them and I’m not trying to disrespect them in any way, but it is too mechanical. You are just doing what Beethoven wrote, it has been written and you are just duplicating it. For me, I will just get the

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record. I will listen to the record. You don’t have to duplicate it for me. It is so incredibly challenging, you have to be a brilliant person to be a classical musician. I like it when it is coming from the individual. It makes it an individual thing for me.

I think the first tune I ever wrote, or tried to write, was when The Challenger went down. I wrote the song, “By the Light That” and I don’t even know how I thought of that. I don’t remember how old I was then, but then again, I don’t even remember how old I am now! It’s like years just fly by. But that is what got me started as far as writing and I never thought I would be a songwriter. In the early 90’s I started going to open mics, and I was not a songwriter at the time. Things were going well, I did a few open mics. I was just performing and then I said to myself, “Am I ever going to get booked in places like this by singing the same ‘ol tunes?” So then I started writing and little by little I gained some support and a following from the community of people at the open mics. I am even still in touch with a few of them! But that is how it all started. And then boom, I landed my first show on a Sunday night at Caffè Lena’s and Bob Gullie took a photo of me that night, he just gave me that photo, I’ll show you that photo later. That was the first time I ever performed solo, and oh, I was nervous. Oh yeah!

When I came back to performing it was better. It was better, it wasn’t as bad. I guess it is justified easily enough, but having a band on stage with me really helps transfer the focus of the audience so they’re not always just focused on me. I never felt like I was a strong enough guitar player, musician, to carry it as a solo. You have all these fears, all these inside things you want to defeat yourself with, the reasons you cant do things. Prior to that, I had been in a couple of bands. But nothing serious, knock around bands. But when I became a songwriter things went very well. I signed to a label out of



New York City. Things were going great but I had two young children and I really had to devote my time to them because I was spending every weekend on the road. I had a full time job that I really could not quit because of family responsibilities. So that is when I gave up music. I sold my guitars, never thought I would ever return. And one thing led to another and, I'm back! It's crazy, and oh, it's great! Things are so different now. I have the freedom to do whatever I need to do. Things are much better now. I have a band that is very supportive and very wonderful to work with. I am very blessed to have them because they are incredibly outstanding musicians.

I feel that I have not succeeded if I walk off the stage and we haven't connected. I can always tell when the connection happens. I love playing the songs and I love that it is my music that we are playing. But the icing on the cake is when I can get people involved. Thank God it has really been happening a lot lately, and we have had a lot of great gigs. Things have been working so beautifully. The key for me is to tell two to three stories when we are performing; I refer to them as humorous anecdotal stories. Like did you hear about the man who wrote the Hokey Pokey? I just read in the paper that he just passed away, It was a great article that they wrote about him.

But it seems, though, that the undertaker had a hard time with him because no sooner would he get the left leg in, and the right leg out. And then I just say, that's what it's all about! I like to put humor in the presentation and in the songs. As far as performing, I took a couple of jokes and memorized them. Make sure I got the right punch line, other than that I just memorized it. I started to try to break the ice, so to speak. And things went well.

When I am singing the songs I panic sometimes because the next verse is coming up and I don't have it. And just before the chord progression hits, the words pop right out. And I have to be confident. When I am confident it works. When I panic too early, then I go to another verse or something.

I break through that with the support I found from people that I know that came out to the shows, because it is just like a pre-show thing. I don't know. It is always a challenge. I guess the nice thing now is that I do not really have that at all. I think it is mainly due to the fact that we are playing so much. And we have really played some really big and really reputable venues. And when I get shaky or something I say to myself, "Hey...you've played here and there, you've done this, get out there and do it!" I don't know really how much it helps! But I like to think it does.

At least it gets my feet walking in the right direction. Just go out and do it. And once I get going, what we are really doing now is aggressive and uptempo music so it is easy to get the jitters out with that.

I have no demands on me as far as just rhythm. I am a rhythm player, so I do not have to do any flat picking or any individual solos or anything. That takes a world of worry out of my life.

My family also helps me break through my doubts, and I don't know if they even realize. I don't vocalize it so much to them. My wife has really seen me breaking down, she's seen me really nervous. She has seen me bouncing around the house before a show, and I'm saying, "What did I forget?!" all of those things. A joke we have between us now is, she will be at work and I will be getting ready and I will call her up and say, "How am I doing?" she replies, "You're doing great!"

When I have the band we just say, "This is us". The band can play. They can really play. They love to play and off they go. I can't really speak for them in a sense but, I don't want to say that they do not care, but they don't care as much as I do whether we connect with the crowd or not. They are going to do their thing because they are not writing the songs they are just performing and they just love to play so they are going to play and hope that the people get into it. I take it a little more personal because I wrote the damn thing. You know?

We try to really stress that when we go to festivals, the Bluegrass festivals, that are not a Bluegrass band, we do not do the Bluegrass harmonies. But when people come up to us after the show they say, "Ahhh that was great! We love Bluegrass, but you are a change of pace, a breath of fresh air." They have never heard the songs before, so that is a challenge for us too, to make people enjoy something they have never heard before. Sometimes we play a show and people are looking at us like, "Where did these guys come from?!" We have had some odd looks from people who are expecting Bluegrass music, I'll tell ya! It is tough sometimes.

We did play in a little town called Margaretville. This was just a few weeks ago, a Wednesday night concert. It was right on Main Street at this church, outside on the church's front lawn. They come out every Wednesday night and hear different music, and they always come out. The crowd was mostly older folk. They looked at us and I said, "Oh my God...this is going to be one long night. It is going to be something." But little by little I told a few stories and everyone started to loosen up and we ended up having a great time. But at the beginning they were right there giving us these looks like, "What are you trying to do?" It is something that when you have you confidence like we do now, as a band, we just know that we are going to play it through. But if I were a solo guy and I was getting that reaction that would

have knocked me for a loop. I would have had a tough time getting on track.

Many people do say, "Why are you still doing it?" What I like to say back to them is, "I don't know any better, I just keep going." What would I be doing if I didn't have music? I don't know. I really don't know. I would probably just be hanging around. I used to be a football coach for many years so if I did not do music I would probably still be coaching football. I might be doing that. It's funny because I say that but I don't think I ever think about my life without music. It is a funny influence that I have. If music is playing, I am out of the conversation; whatever is playing has got me. Background music I know nothing of, I don't know what background music means. Music just totally dominates my brain once I hear it. Even if I don't care for the music it will distract me. Music is a great thing and music is really a big deal for me and for the other guys in the band.

I write my music at my house. I should be more disciplined to carry a pad of paper around with me all the time, and I don't. But I will get ideas, and then later I will bring it to my home. I have a great big artist tablet and I will write a verse here, write a chorus there, and put it all over the place on this big piece of paper. Finally when I get it sort of put together I will put it on my computer. Then I will start editing once it is all on my computer. I edit a lot. I mean, I really hammer away. I like to think songs are forever changing. There are songs that I am still changing that I wrote fifteen years ago; I am going to try to bring a few back. We are due to go into the studio in December, so we are getting ready for a new release because we have enough tunes now. I have written around nine new ones, they are just about ready to go. It is very painful, the recording process. I love being in the studio but getting it all laid down is tough enough. But then picking things apart over and over, you start to get weary of the tune, almost like, "I have heard it enough!!" But it is a great thing to have your music recorded. I am very fortunate and grateful for that.

My thought is always, It is great to have goals, I have always thought to take little steps. Certainly have your next goal, your next step, have it be simple enough that you can accomplish it and you can, to some degree, feel a sense of accomplishment. So you can keep progressing and keep moving forward. That is the way I do it in a very simple way. Where do I want to go? What do I want to do next? And I keep it right there. I don't want to say, if I am not a mega star in five years then I am done. I want to say, this is my life, it will always be a part of my life. Keep it in the proper context, but just keep your goals within reach. Keep the goal attainable, practical and within reach. You can always set a lot of goals. Never set yourself up or failure. Never get disappointed, just keep moving forward. As slow as the progress may be, just keep going forward.



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I hope, that for who I am and what I have done, I would like to think that my son thinks I am a hero, and my daughter. I would like to think that, when I think about the kind of parent I have always wanted to be. I would like for them to come out of this whole thing thinking that they were fortunate enough to have me as a father. I don't know who else would think of me as a hero- I don't know. I would hope somebody. ”

*J. Gaudet*