

MUSIC

THEY KEEP CHUGGING ALONG

Local music mainstays Jim Gaudet and the Railroad Boys to celebrate CD release with Albany show

By Alexander Stern

Jim Gaudet is a warm, self-effacing man whose humility belies his talent.

"I started in the very late '80s as a solo singer/songwriter," he says wistfully. "But I don't see myself as a vocalist or an instrumentalist."

Now in their 10th year, Jim Gaudet and the Railroad Boys boast a following that indicates that audiences don't necessarily agree with Jim on that last point. The band's fifth album, "When It Rains," is about to drop after a gestation period of a year and a half, and Gaudet and the band will be celebrating the blessed event with a show on Friday night at the Linda Norris Auditorium.

"We expected to get it out sooner," Gaudet says, "But we finally got it going. It's been a real crunch during the last few weeks."

The show will feature regular band members Sten Isachsen (mandolin) and Bobby Ristau (bass/harmony vocals), along with guest fiddler Sara Milonovich.

"Sten, Bobby and I have been playing together for 10 years," Gaudet says with a chuckle. "We've been through a couple of fiddle players over the years. The way

we got together was totally happenstance. I'd been out of the business for a while, and I had a few new tunes I wanted to record. Michael Eck sent me to Sten at Bender Studios. That was where I learned that Sten plays the mandolin. We played a few tunes together and one thing led to another."

"I knew Bobby through a group that got together on Wednesday nights to play," he continues. "We decided to see if we could do a gig, so I called Sarah Craig at Caffe Lena. We had no vision of being a band as long as we have been, that's for sure."

"Caffe Lena and the Eighth Step are the places I started out playing," he says. "I did the open mics and developed a local base. Some of my friends today are people I met at the open mics. The Caffe Lena is still one of my favorite places to play. It's a sacred place."

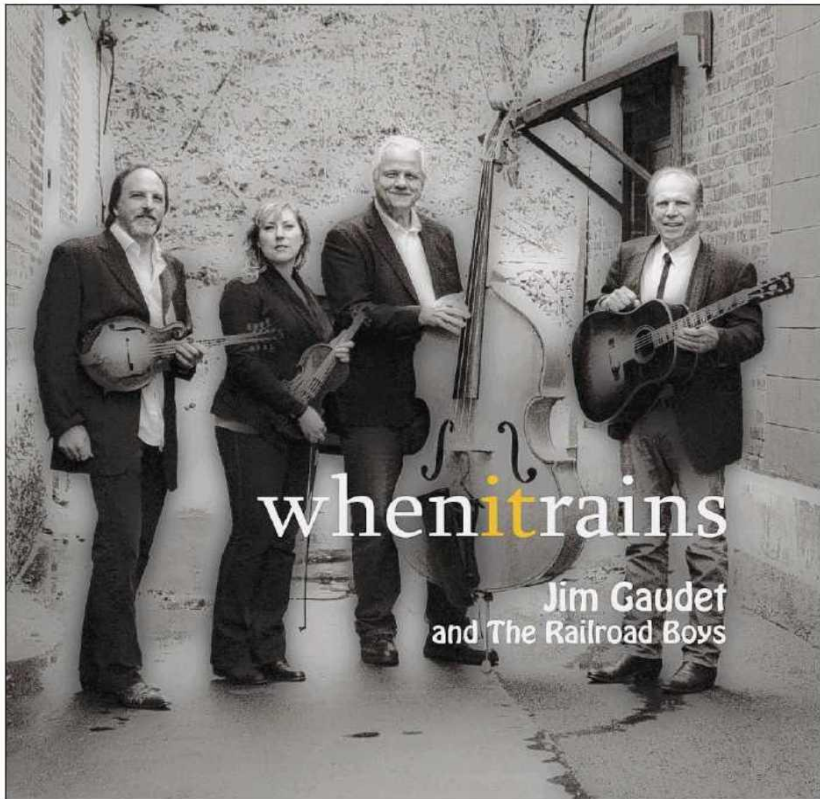
"As I said," he continues, "I never con-

sidered myself a singer or an instrumentalist. I'm a songwriter first and foremost. My influences are people like Dylan, John Prine, Randy Newman and Loudon Wainwright. Steve Earle is a current influence on my writing.

"We get along so well," Gaudet says of his bandmates, "We each play a certain role. The guys are so supportive of my experimenting. They go along with anything I write. They have no interest in writing and I have no interest in soloing, which is Sten's thing. Bobby's a great harmony vocalist. We each have our own thing."

"We've played some great places," he says. "One of greatest thrills of my life was playing on 'Music City Roots' in Nashville. We've also played a lot of festivals like Winterfest in Seattle, the High Mountain Hay Fever Bluegrass Festival in Westcliffe, Colo., and, of course, the Greyfox Festival, which has been absolutely wonderful to us.

"It's difficult being a band that plays original material," says Gaudet. "You have to be able to connect with the audi-



Jim Gaudet and the Railroad Boys



If you go

- **Where:** Linda Norris Auditorium, 339 Central Ave., Albany
- **When:** 8 p.m. Friday
- **Admission:** \$15
- **Info:** <http://www.thelinda.org>

ence. People like us when they see us the first time, because we strike that connection early on. When we go to a place like Washington, D.C., being able to connect with people is what gets audiences coming back the next time we're in town."

Does Jim think that the Railroad Boys will go on for another 10 years?

"I don't know if I've got another 10 years in me," he laughs, "But we're going to keep playing until the wheels come off or we run out of gas!"

► Alexander Stern is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.