

Steve Boden

Interviewed by Tony Welch

Steve Boden— whose added touch has enlivened the PDJS stage for close to a decade— is a dyed-in-the-wool polygamist. Steve's first wife, Duanna, customarily speaks to her husband via word of mouth. His second spouse, however, speaks through Steve whenever he holds her in his embrace. Her name, of course, is Guitar. And it all began, Steve says, when...

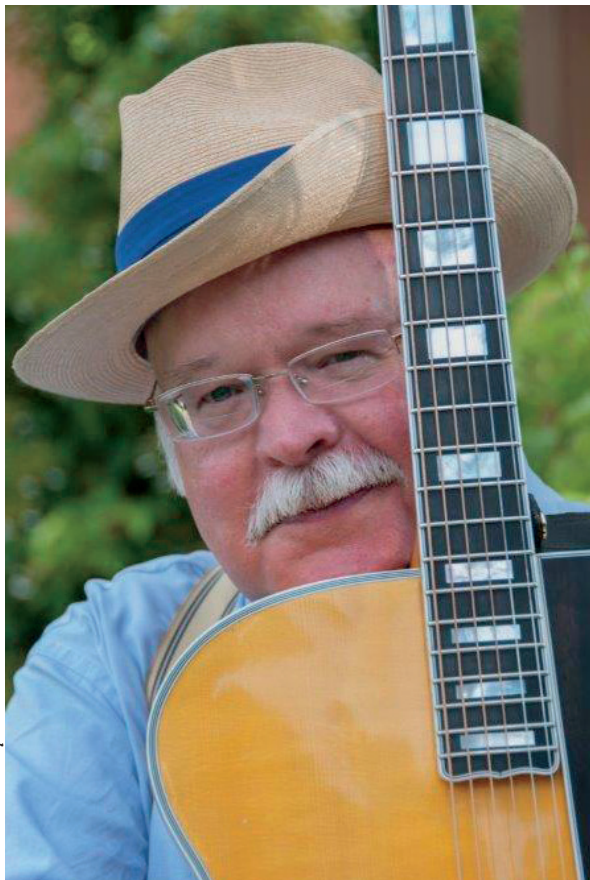


Photo: Melody Saunders

"At age 14 I was laid up with an injury. A neighbor loaned me a guitar. I was intrigued by the sound and the feel of it. I was already into choirs, school and church singing. Singing came easy to me and I loved it. Now suddenly, the guitar became a key element. I picked up on folk, rock, blues and country artists— and soon learned how they backed their vocals with the guitar. I pumped a ton of root beer and flipped countless burgers to afford my first Gibson guitar.

"At 16, I formed a 60's rock band. That meant persistence and team work— learning to blend in with differing artistic personalities. I also learned how to rehearse and polish a band, operate sound systems and make bookings. Gradually, I expanded into bluegrass, classic country, western swing, standard ballads and Dixieland. That meant mastering the jazz of the 20's and 30's, along with a six

string borrowed banjo.

"I grew up in Rockford, Illinois. On moving to Portland in 1973 at age 25, I hosted the 'Ragtime Show' on KBOO radio. It was there I discovered the recordings of pioneer jazz guitarist Eddie Lang. His work with violinist Joe Venuti, Bix Beiderbecke, Bing Crosby and the Paul Whiteman Orchestra really influenced me. Over time I've tried to copy Eddie's licks, more so than of any other guitarist. Eddie did it like I never heard before!

"I toured almost 10 years throughout the upper northwest, guitar and piano duo. Colleges, county fairs, and festivals. Once, to Hawaii on tour. The wonderful folks we played for were remarkably open-minded and accepting of our early jazz performances— which included comedy, light history and tales of the jazz age.

"Touring, however, is not without danger. May 18, 1980. We'd played

Wilbur, WA the day before, and awoke to a giant silvery 'cauliflower' cloud hovering overhead, crackling with lightning. We were directly downwind of Mt. St. Helens. An inch of reddish brown ash covered everything by the time we reached Kennewick, where we came across a store front sign reading: "Wet Rags/50 Cents." Another time, our tour truck broke down and we bailed out at the first motel in sight. But our room was already occupied. The little rascals crawled up our legs and drove us from our beds into the shower, shouting expletives. We finally made it to the Seattle Bumbershoot Festival— itching to perform. Literally.

"I'm usually quick to pick up on a melody by ear, with the chords to follow. The charts, however, have shown me some marvelous changes, and I try not to overlook the songwriter's intent. I like Cole Porter's 'Let Misbehave' for its cunning lyrics and crafty chords. Listening to Sophie Tucker or Bing Crosby doing 'Some Of These Days.' You'll hear vastly different treatments, but the tune's essence always come shining through. 'Yes Sir That's My Baby.' Man! What infectious, driving hot jazz!

"My present musical ensemble — 'Jass Two Plus One,' -- is the offspring of 'Jass Two,' with Teddy Deane, an ace reed man and musical entrepreneur. Teddy was good at booking us on river boats. When health issues forced Teddy's departure, I enlarged the group by adding a bassist. So today, along with Dick Saunders on reeds and John Walling on bass, 'Jass Two Plus One' keeps pretty busy. Our first CD was 'Jass For Fun.' So both my inspiration and enthusiasm— which never seem to diminish— remain focused on the jazz of the 20's and 30's. In between, I gladly join in with PDJS, Pink Lady and John Bennett's Jazz Band, among others in the Dixieland community. To sum up— I'm just a kid again, doing what I did again..."