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## Harmonies of a “girlyman”

By Alan Lewis  
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

“We were always headed in this direction,” said Ty Greenstein of the harmony group Girlyman, speaking of herself and friend/bandmate Doris Muramatsu. “When we met Nate [Borofsky] in college, the three of us would sit around and play guitars and sing songs, and since there were three of us, we’d make up different parts to sing so we wouldn’t get bored. When we started Girlyman, we already knew what to do and how to do it, in terms of singing together.”

It shows. In the field of pop group vocals, Girlyman is in the rarest of company. It should be a luxurious sonic bubble bath for the ears when this threesome takes the Higher Ground stage on Wednesday.

“Doris and I were sort of harmony geeks from very early on,” recalled Greenstein. “I remember my dad gave me a tape of the Everly Brothers when I was about 13, and I was fascinated by the way the voices sang different parts but blended perfectly. I taught myself all the harmonies just because it was so fun to sing along.”

There is no finer place to start than the Everlys.

“From there I guess somehow we discovered Simon and Garfunkel, and that was like the next level, because they did things like counterpoint. Doris and I discovered that not only did we love figuring out all the parts, we were in luck because she was a soprano and I was an alto, and our voices blended eerily well.

“Later on, we discovered that some contemporary groups were doing even more sophisticated things with harmonies — notably the Indigo Girls and Jonathan Brooke’s old group, The Story. The Story in particular used lots of strange dissonance and even more complex, almost choral, counterpoints. I remember when Doris and I heard that for the first time our heads practically exploded.”

Former Story vocalist Jennifer Kimball, now of Maybe Baby and the Wayfaring Strangers, is easily among the finest harmony singers of recent times. One can place her name confidently alongside Phil Everly’s.

Perfecting group vocals normally in-



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volves exhaustive rehearsing, though this is by no means the whole story.

“We spend a lot of time writing our vocal parts for the songs, and they’re often very tight with lots of suspensions that have to be hit exactly to sound in tune,” said Greenstein. “So the hardest thing in any situation, especially live, is hearing each other and tuning. Recently, we decided to start using in-ear monitors, which makes us look a little like Secret Service, but we can hear a lot better now.”

*Joyful Sign*, the latest Girlyman album, is scheduled for release on April 13. Advance copies are available exclusively at shows.

“*Joyful Sign* to me is our most exciting CD yet,” said Greenstein. “The title comes from the song by the same name, which contains the line,

*Sometimes leaving is a joyful sign  
Like a little child singing*

*‘This little light of mine,  
Gonna let it shine, let it shine.’*

So the song, and the album as a whole, is really about that theme — leaving. But really it’s about that thrilling moment when you decide to leave something known for something unknown. There’s joy in that, a sense of freedom.

“This has been a time of transitions for Girlyman — after living together in the same Brooklyn apartment for five years, we’re all moving out. A couple of us are leaving New York altogether. But there’s this sense of real possibility in making this change, and the chance to commit to the band even more when we’re not all living on top of each other.”

Where did this trio get its moniker you ask? “It’s a fun name, that’s all,” said Greenstein. “It has a playfulness about it that resonates with us. We said it and it clicked instantly.”

Greenstein tells of these three also clicking with their own Vermont jingle. “We have a song called ‘Moose in the Road’ that Nate spontaneously wrote after a gig in Vermont, when I was driving. There were all these moose-crossing signs, and I said ‘Wow, I’ve never seen a moose. I’d really like to see one ... but not in the road.’”

So, Borofsky took the mandolin out and started singing. And here are some of the lyrics that came out:

*There are lots of animals that our van  
could handle  
Like a dog or a cat or a frog or a toad  
Even a deer, we’d probably still live  
But I don’t wanna see no moose in  
the road.*

“Of course, we all love animals, so it’s an appalling song, but it’s really funny and occasionally we even play it onstage,” said Greenstein.

Asked if there could be a perfect double-bill involving Girlyman, what would be the other act, Greenstein said, “We’ve already toured with our heroes, the Indigo Girls, which was transcendent. We’d love to open for the Dixie Chicks at some point, because they’re such amazing musicians and clearly such cool people with loads of integrity.”

So Girlyman is hitting the road in support of a new album. But with this crew, all roads lead back to that trademark rich, tight blending of voices.

“The harmonies are really unusual, and I think really deep because they come from this place of love that we all have for each other,” said Greenstein. “Also we’ve known each other so long that we have sort of a shared humor that we try to bring other people into at our shows. So a lot of people say that going to a Girlyman show is like hanging out with friends — if your friends also happen to play a lot of instruments.”

Girlyman’s moose-ready band van is bound for Higher Ground: the place to be for glorious harmony. 🚐

**Who:** Girlyman with Adrienne  
**Where:** Higher Ground, South Burlington  
**When:** Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.  
**For more information:**  
[www.highergroundmusic.com](http://www.highergroundmusic.com), [www.girlyman.com](http://www.girlyman.com)