

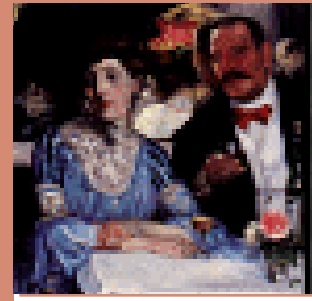
CULTURE

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Mando a mando

By Alan Lewis
Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

The 1977 vinyl album by Burlington's Pine Island titled *Live Inside on Vermont's Fretless/Philo* record label is a perfect treasury of Vermont music-scene references, from the very names of the band members to notes on back of the cover signed by "Susan Greene" and special thanks to Zoot Wilson of the popular N-Zones.

This concert recording, made at West Brattleboro's Chelsea House, was engineered by Bill Gehman whose passing was recently noted in the *Guardian*.

"I do recall making that record," said mandolin hero Jimmy Ryan in a recent e-mail interview. "It was the first one I was ever on. I also remember staying at their house and the coffee with cinnamon sticks in it and bumming those More brand menthol smokes from Bill. I was in Brattleboro for dinner at the Common Ground just last night. I was up at Imaginary Road Studios in Dummerston doing some mandolin parts."

After being profiled in an early issue of the *Vermont Guardian*, Ryan called himself a "sort of Vermonter." But he is in-state so often it might be best to forget the words "sort of." And he is not the only one who recalls that coffee with cinnamon sticks.

Following Pine Island, Ryan was all over a must-have Gordon Stone album, *Scratchin' the Surface*.

Though mandolin is dearest to Ryan's heart, he was a world-class rock bassist — no exaggeration — with the Burlington new wave band, The Decentz. "I played bass on a couple records lately," he recalled, "and I love to play the thing."

While music made during Ryan's Vermont years was highly praised, many fans know him

best for the Massachusetts band, the Blood Oranges. *Brattleboro Reformer* and *Berkshire Eagle* music columnist Dave Madeloni tells a great story about being knocked out by a Blood Oranges reunion show when Ryan picked his mandolin like a rock 'n' roll lead guitarist.

"Sure, I played that way a lot with Blood Oranges," explained Ryan. "I wanted to be loud and rock my ass off. You have to remember, we were playing places like CBGB'S in New York and The Rathskellar in Boston. Lots of rock joints. I still wanted to be as loud as Mark Spencer and in the meantime I had learned how to be."

Blood Oranges overlapped with Mark Sandman's old band, Treat Her Right, to form the side project called — what else — Treat Her Orange. Asked what we lost with Sandman's late-1990s death, Ryan said, "We all lost a true individual. As a musician and a person. Mark was a lot of fun. Always thinking and creating. I'm glad I still get to work at Hi-n-Dry, which is his old studio and home."

That's right. The Hi-n-Dry recording studio is Sandman's old living quarters, where much of his music originated.

Ryan showed great patience, shall we say, in waiting until 2002 to release a first album under his own name, the fine *Lost Diamond Angel*. He has since topped that record with his 2005 *Gospel Shirt* EP.

"My new CD, *Jimmy Ryan & Hayride*, is us playing live," he said. "It's the interaction between me and my mandolin with Duke Levine's guitar with Billy Beard's drums with Andrew Mazzone's bass and harmonies. We recorded some live at Hi-n-Dry Studios and some at the Lizard Lounge. Both places are in Cambridge, MA. You can buy the CD at the Middle Earth show or online at hi-n-dry.com. The



Jimmy Ryan

vibe is similar to what will be heard at the show.

"I really wanted to capture our live sound — us in a room playing together. I want the listener to hear how we listen to each other while we play and respond. No studio trickery. Studio albums are so much fun because you can fix and be fantastic in the electronic possibilities. I wanted the new record to be in the moment. The one we recorded it in. ...

"[T]here are always interesting things going on in the mando world," said Ryan commenting on various playing styles. "I try to play with an open-minded approach, throwing in rock, bluegrass, Celtic, Middle Eastern, and Carnatic (southern Indian) influ-

"David Grisman may have the widest impact on mandolin awareness in the world. His stuff with the Dead and duos with Garcia. He covered a lot of ground and influenced a lot of mandolinists, deservedly so."

Grisman began covering great stretches of musical ground really early, too. Big fans of 60s music and younger folks who are historically minded may know that Grisman was in arguably the best psychedelic band out of Boston, Earth Opera, with Peter Rowan.

Ryan's coming Middle Earth gig is with Bow Thayer and the Perfect Train Wreck. "Bow was a resident of Somerville, Massachusetts, when I met him, like eight to nine years ago. We all used to play at the now defunct Tir na nOg pub. So, we heard each other's music. We know all the same musicians. Bow has written some great songs that I still play in bands here in Boston. That's a good sign when you can move away and your songs stick around."

What is it about this bill that will draw an audience to the Middle Earth? "I know for a fact," declared Ryan, "that every soul that comes in that night will leave even happier than when they came in. We are going to play our butts off!! It'll be infectious."

Popular picker Bow Thayer, a train that is wrecked to perfection, and the return of legendary mandolin player Jimmy Ryan ought to keep the Middle Earth faithful on track all night. 🎵

photo by Megan Summers

ences. Plus some bop, now and again."

"I used to see Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong a lot in the early 70s at S.U.N.Y. Binghamton growing up," he said speaking of a legendary African-American string band that often played Vermont. "Huge influence on me. Ry [Cooder] totally knew where they were coming from.

Event information

Who: Bow Thayer and the Perfect Train Wreck with Jimmy Ryan
Where: Middle Earth Music Hall in Bradford
When: Saturday, April 21
For more information: www.middle-earth-music.com/, www.bow-thayer.com, www.jimmyryan.net