

The Free Lance-Star FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

awareness to environmental issues or sings about Fredericksburg, where he has lived since 1972"—Emily Gilmore, 10/28/04

River-lover Gramann Plays Campfire Concert

The Friends of the Rappahannock couldn't have found a performer more compatible with their cause than Bob Gramann.

The local folk singer, who will appear at the FOR Campfire Concert fund-raiser this month, performs original songs about the river and about nature.

Washington Post critic Eve Zibart has described him as "a where's my Whole-Earth-catalogue sort of New Guy who'd rather be kayaking than fighting the good lawn fight." "It's just something I really love to do," Gramann said this week. "I try to get out [on the Rappahannock] three or four times a week."

One of the songs on his new tape is "Rappahannock Running Free." His song "Mountain Stream" presents a whitewater paddler's view of spring. "The Battle of the Squirrel and the CEO" chronicles the bird-feeder battle between retirees and squirrels.--Mike Zitz, 7/1/93

The Washington Post "... Fredericksburg's **Bob Gramann**, a where's-my-Whole-Earth-catalogue sort of New Guy who'd rather be kayaking than fighting the good lawn fight."--Eve Zibart, 4/30/93

WQRA, Warrenton, VA

Bob "did a superb job. He's got a great sense of humor and had the audience in stitches." --Dick Cerri, 11/18/95

WRDV FM, Lafayette Hill, PA

"... a singer-songwriter who can do both... The humor is refreshing class in a world of serious and self-indulgent mediocrity. Plus (he) can play and make the tunes fit the songs. My album of the week. Wonderful stuff!"--Tor Jonassen, 1/6/96

CROSSROADS

TRACKING FOLK, FOLK-ROCK AND WORLD MUSIC RADIO / JULY-AUG. 1996 - V.1, NO.1

songwriting treasure and local activist, Bob Gramann leads an active, diverse life ... which becomes abundantly clear from the songs on this new CD. Gramann sings of

"His vocals are friendly and familiar-sounding, whether he tells a humorous story, brings



Original Folk Traditional Folk Other Folk's Folk

rivers, encroaching urbanization, unemployment and world politics, and even takes a lighthearted dive into the electrochemical soup of love and the genetic code. With his classic fingerpicking and humorous storytelling, Gramann serves up a healthy dose of homespun fun and socially conscious songwriting. --Laurie Larson 8/96

Listen.com

"Lighthearted acoustic songs about trying to stick it to the Man. Bob Gramann's approximations of old time Political Folk songs contain a social relevance that will put a bee in your bonnet and a smile on your face." --Eric Shea

The ^{Mary Washington} BULLET

Picker's Supply Showcases Songwriters

...The show itself was amazing, not a weak link in

any of the performers. Gramann, who has won several awards for song writing in numerous DC folk song contests, lead off the showcase.

Described as a "where's-my-Whole-Earth-catalogue sort of New Guy" by Washington Post critic Eve Zibart, Gramann's music is low key, enjoyable, and very approachable. He is definitely the working man's folk singer, and those who enjoy just sitting back and taking it slowly would enjoy Gramann's low-key approach to music. "[Folk music] means it's accessible, people can understand what's happening to it without a music degree, the topics are about things which people can understand. Its music for folks," Gramann said.

Gramann, who's own self-produced, self-written, and self-distributed CD ("You've gotta believe in yourself," Gramann said) "Mostly True Songs" has been available at the Blue Dog since June, opened the show with "The Battle of the Squirrel and the CEO," which brings up another unique facet to Gramann's approach to song writing. "I try to stretch the envelope on topics of what folk music can be about. That's why I like folk music, it

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can be about everything. I try to prove it," Gramann said... --Rob Thornmeyer, 11/2/95
"...witty and insightful originals on guitar and banjo."
--Sing Out! Summer 2001

Martinsburg Journal

Bob Gramann can thank Paul Simon for teaching him how to play guitar. Gramann says when he was in high school he would put on Simon's records and listen to them for hours, trying to copy his licks. But since then, Gramann has honed his own style and has been making a full-time career making music. On Friday, Gramann will perform as part of the First Friday Coffeehouse at Trinity United Methodist Church, 220 W. Martin St.

Gramann says music has always been a part of his life. "As a baby, my mom used to sing for me," he says in a telephone from his Virginia home. At age 12, Gramann received his first guitar. "I've been playing ever since," he says. By the early 1990s, Gramann decided that he wanted to become a full-time performer, and he knew that he specifically wanted to be a singer-songwriter. So he went to a bookstore and purchased what he calls a "cookbook," the book, titled, "How to Write Great Lyrics." The book helped and soon Gramann was finding his own voice and songwriting skills that weaves political satire and real life observations with humor. Actually, Gramann ended up winning an award for the first song he wrote under the guidance of the book.

Since then, Gramann has continued to produce music. His first foray, "Mostly New Songs," spurred the local hit "Traffic Light" that appeared on "Car Talk." His album, "Mostly True Songs" contains such notables as "You're Nothing But a Pack of Neurons." His third album, "That Squirrel Song" contains the favorite, "The Battle of the Squirrel and the CEO." "Every time I play the song, someone in the audience always comes up to tell me their squirrel story," he says.

And along the way, Gramann has earned awards, notably "a surprise" WAMMIE nomination. "It went to Tom Paxton that night," he says. But Gramann isn't worried about the awards, though. It's more about the work than the awards, he says.

His latest album, "Granddad Planted Trees," which includes the title track and "Sara Sing," about a guitar. Gramann says he decided to release the album because he hadn't had released any new material since 2001.

When it comes to songwriting, Gramann is methodical, approaching a piece of music similar to a term paper. He starts with an outline, then goes line by line, verse by verse. By then he's looking for catchy lines and focusing on what the song is saying. On occasion a melody will find him, but mostly it's the words that are his focus. "The rest is like a math problem," he says. Gramann says he makes a point to finish writing all of his songs. But it's not until he takes his new material to the masses does he feel like it's finished. He says he'll see how the audience reacts, maybe even tinker with some of the lines. "Then I declare it finished," he says.

Knowing how tough it can be for upcoming singer-songwriters, so he and fellow songwriter Peter Mealy, founded Fredericksburg Songwriters' Showcase in 1982. The concerts are housed at Picker's Supply, of which Mealy is manager. "Essentially it started because we needed a venue to play our songs," he says.

He says as a performer he doesn't care for playing bars. "And they don't prefer obscure original songs either," he says with a laugh.

Music, he says, is something he enjoys. "It's interplay of the brain, the fingers and the voice and the coming together for a unified song," he says.

When he's not performing, Gramann is doing his second love — building guitars. His first guitar came from a kit he purchased from Pennsylvania in 1992. The kit wasn't as easy as it sounded. "It was really just a box of wood," he says. After building that first guitar, Gramann used it to play for many of his performances. "But it just ate at me. I could build another one, a better one," he says. Since then, Gramann has honed his craftsmanship and says he makes guitars that have a combination of a good sound and playability. "I feel like I make a very good guitar," he says. Gramann says playing the guitar has prepared him for building guitars. "Being a player made me a better instrument builder," he says. He's been able to support himself now with his performances and his hand-built guitars. "I just have to keep doing what I do," he says.

Now, if only Paul Simon would buy a guitar. -- Crystal Schelle, 1/5/07