

TIME CAPTAIN: A BLUEGRASS JOURNEY

The first bluegrass guitar lessons I ever had were from a fellow down at Fiddler's Green music store in Austin by the name of **Geoff Union**.

It was one of the most intimidating moments of life because I realized 1) I had no idea what I was doing and 2) my teacher was one of the most accomplished guitar players I had ever sat next to.

But, with Geoff's patience and help and that of others as well, I've come to play and appreciate bluegrass music more than I could have ever imagined.

I'm convinced we are who we are today because of the people who have been influencers in our earlier lives.

So, when I got word that Geoff and the band **Ragged Union** would soon release a new CD, I knew it was time to get an update from one of Austin's bluegrass sons.

CTBA: Let's take a couple of steps back in history. When did you leave Austin and where did you wind up?

GU: We moved from Austin in the fall of 2013, first to Golden, Colorado, and then later to Boulder, aka 'land of the beautiful people' and home of some insanely strong weed. (Ed: I'm sure Geoff is referring to how much harder it is in Boulder to mow your lawn.)

CTBA: Give us a short update of what you did in Austin as far as bluegrass is concerned (teach, play, etc.).

GU: I had the pleasure of playing in the Two High String Band from 2002-2011 or so, through all of its emanations, from quartet to trio to drums to Alan Munde. I don't remember any of it but it was a lot of fun. Before that I did a brief stint on upright bass with a thing called Bluegrass Drive-By, which included Scott Biram of the Dirty Old One Man Band fame. I offered cheap therapy thinly disguised as guitar lessons at Fiddler's Green for a year or two before leaving Austin. About the last thing I did there bluegrass wise was record a solo CD called *Cold as Steel*, which you can find on iTunes and CD Baby. It was recorded and produced by Billy Bright, in the closet behind his garage, and featured Steven Crow on bass, Mark Maniscalco on banjo, and Ricky on fiddle.

CTBA: The band, Ragged Union, picked up there in Colorado. Who all do you have playing in the band?

GU: We didn't start with this lineup, but are fortunate as a kid on Christmas morning to have some of the best pickers out here with us right now: Jordan Ramsey, who won the national mandolin championship at Winfield last year, Chris Elliott on banjo (formerly of Spring Creek), and Justin Hoffenberg on fiddle.



CTBA: Based on your Twitter feed [@raggedunionbg](#), y'all seem to stay pretty busy. How is playing in Colorado and area going? How different is it from Texas?

GU: I'd say its going pretty good overall! There are some differences - there's a lot of work for bluegrass and string bands up here - lots of clubs along the Front Range and in the mountains, and a festival under every rock and behind every tree, just about every weekend in the summertime. One thing that is exactly the same - when we leave the state to tour, its a long, long drive from where we live to where we're going. Used to be we'd drive 18 hours from Austin to play in Colorado, now we drive the same distance to play in the Pacific Northwest or the Southeast. I'm sure there's a gig in Wyoming somewhere; I'll find it someday!

CTBA: Tell us about your latest trip to the UK.

GU: Well, over here we have moonshine, over there they have, on the one hand, something called Poitin (pronounced poo TEEN) which is Irish moonshine basically. But, what we discovered on this trip is a beverage they call Scrumpy - a home-brew apple cider drink, basically just fresh pressed apple juice left around to ferment for a while. It's a lot different from the bottled cider like what we have here. It's cloudy, it smells bad, and after a few drinks, the first thing to go is your legs. But, generally, we've had a great time, the audiences and promoters and everyone are super enthusiastic and interested. We played some big folk festivals over there, and the biggest English bluegrass festival, Didmarton, which takes place on an airfield about an hour west of London. There were a couple of really good bands, and a giant bonfire with lots of picking all night long.



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CTBA: Your new album, *Time Captain*, is out now on Apple Music, iTunes, just about everywhere.

GU: The release date was October 27th, and it'll be on iTunes, or you can get an actual CD on CDBaby or at our website, raggedunionbluegrass.com, or if you get close enough, I'll throw one at you.

CTBA: Where was it recorded and produced?

GU: I recorded it at my house in Boulder, using API pre-amps, AKG 451s and some modified Avantone and Rode tube mics, and a 57 on the banjo. We had it mixed at eTown studio in Boulder by James Tuttle, and took it to David Glasser's new magical mystery mastering Airshow studio in the mountains outside Boulder.

CTBA: Who wrote what?

GU: Christina wrote a few, I collaborated on some numbers with my longtime lyric partner, Jim Harris. Chris Elliott gave us a banjo tune, *Cross Country Chimes*, and we did our own version of Joe Val's version of the old cowboy tune, *Diamond Joe*.

CTBA: Do you have a favorite on the album? Any vinyl?

GU: It'll be available on CD and for download. I have a record player but we're not doing vinyl right now! Favorite wise, I don't know, there's some pretty heavy variation on this one, from the straight-ahead traditional sounding numbers like *If You Don't Love Me* and *Leaving Town*, to the old-timey, *Leaving Louisville*, to the progressive sounding, *Rented Room*. I'm pretty happy with how it all worked out.

CTBA: I hear it gets cold up there during the winter. What do you have planned for the band as we head into winter and spring?

GU: We'll be in the Southeast for a 10 day tour at the end of October. We're doing a big CD release concert at Swallow Hill on November 11, and then heading back out to Washington and Oregon for a week in early December. As far as next year goes we're working on some festivals, return trips to the NW and SE, and hopefully getting back to the UK again; its like a sore tooth, i just can't stop messing with it. Maybe one of these days we'll get down to Texas, if y'all don't wash away down there...

We can only hope and pray for no more floods, Geoff. Take a look at the Ragged Union website raggedunionbluegrass.com for the latest happenings with the band, their music, and their schedule. And while you're at it, grab a copy of their latest CD, **Time Captain**. It'll make you smile and remember that you don't have to be a Time Captain to enjoy good bluegrass music, but it can't hurt.

