

Geffery B. Cassuto

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Summary/Bio

My name is Geffery Cassuto. I was born in 1985 in Baltimore, MD. I was raised in Pasadena, MD where I attended public school. I am a self taught musician specializing in string instruments, mainly guitar, banjo, violin/fiddle, and mandolin. With the influence of my parents, I came obsessed with music of all kinds at a very young age. In my elementary school years, I discovered I had a keen ear and began singing along with music I heard at home and in church. At age 10, I began teaching myself guitar, with tuning and some chording assistance from my father. I was soon able to tune by ear. I worked hard at my 3 first chords, and played incessantly. More musical influence from my father began to influence my direction, and obsession such as Experimental, Jazz, Punk Rock, Reggae, Folk, Bluegrass, Hip Hop and more, but it was the Blues that grabbed my attention. My life was altered after hearing the Blues/Gospel of Blind Willie Johnson. Country blues and pre-war American music became a full time passion around age 15. The other pivotal musical experience was hearing John Coltrane at some point in Middle School. This opened my ears and mind to the possibilities of improvisation. At this time I was attempting to translate some of these concepts that I was hearing in country blues, punk, and jazz onto electric guitar. I was trying to comprehend using alternate tunings, using a slide, and eventually alternating bass fingerpicking from various American Folk Music. At 16 I heard the music of Maryland native John Fahey and my path would be altered forever. His use of folk and blues idioms, world music and modern classical influences in his own compositions as well as his pitch perfect use of fingerpicks on acoustic guitar was spellbinding to me. I decided that I had to capture this sound and use it as a tool for myself. I began to study his work and methods by ear and began to copy them closely. Fahey's emotional openness without the use of vocals, just a solo acoustic guitar, was mystifying and enlightening to me. It made me question everything, musical, psychological and existential about my own life. It made me dig deep into the guitar and myself. I continued to play other instruments, now with some of Fahey's concepts that I had gleaned such as alternate tunings, modality, drone, minor keys, use of silence, slides and bending of notes to create open space, evoke mystery and paint mental pictures instrumentally. I later read some of his writing wherein he dismisses formality in music and instead promotes the plumbing of ones consciousness as the crux of creativity and how that should preclude any truly affecting piece of music or art. This very much appealed to me and my developing sense of non conformity.

I moved to Baltimore City from Anne Arundel county in 2007 and began playing in a mostly electric rock band that played a few severely shambolic shows over a few years. I also played solo around town, doing my original folk-esque acoustic material for voice and guitar. In 2008, I joined a string band named the Baltimore String Felons. We were initially inspired by Appalachian folk music, but composed several original songs over 6 years. I played fiddle and mandolin mostly as well backing vocals and occasional guitar. We had a decent impact on the music scene in Baltimore, inspiring many of our friends to pick up acoustic instruments and play what they felt. We played countless house shows and did several tours around the U.S. We made two full length albums and got some decent press for them both. We unofficially disbanded in 2015 and began pursuing other projects, solo and otherwise. I have since self released two official solo albums of original material. My latest work entitled Before The Apocalypse was put on hold when my best friend and music partner passed away in July 2017. We had recorded the bulk of a full length album of original instrumental guitar duets which was a culmination of our collective influences up until that point. We had done a few performances that went over well and decided to try and make the best recording possible of our music. Since his passing, the final stages of the recording process have been slow going. I will continue to finish this process and release this recording. Our music has been the creative endeavor that I am most proud of in my life as it embodies years of collaboration and a summation of cumulative musical and spiritual influences: the initial folk and Americana guitar styles, John Fahey, middle eastern and other world musics, as well as the drone of experimental sounds and doom metal. With my friend gone, I have found it hard to continue but I must go on. It seems like music and performing are the most powerful healing forces for grief and tragedy. My goal is to hopefully provide some sense of relief for others experiencing hurt and loss and to connect people with themselves in order to break down barriers between each other.

Objectives

I am hoping to further my potential possibilities in terms of recording output, performance and travel. As a self taught musician, it has been almost impossible for me and many like to make a living off my musical talents. That includes having the means to make quality recordings of my music that are truly representative of the best of what I have to offer creatively. I dream of having the means to have a space where I can experiment with and execute my ideas without having to ask permission and/or bother someone with noise elsewhere in a shared space. I dream of being able to afford instruments that are better in tone and quality and make it easier to play them. I have also been dreaming of running a small record label in Baltimore for years and that never come to fruition for financial reasons. Also, any sort of touring or music related traveling I have ever done, it has been on my own dime or aiding by the kindness of others and it is almost impossible to sustain. I dream of being able to take my creations to other areas of the country or the world and share them with people.

Musical Endeavors

Solo Projects 2003-Present

First Solo Recordings 2003-2007 can be found under the name Geff Stiubhairt:
<https://soulgasmrecords.bandcamp.com/>

2012-2015

- Sounds of Uncertainty (2012)

Recorded and Produced by Geffery Cassuto
Solo improv acoustic guitar, violin, banjo, as well as composed songs with vocal accompaniment. <https://geffstiubhairt.bandcamp.com>

- Mt. Clare Junction (2015)

Recorded and produced by Geffery Cassuto.
Original folk songs and instrumental compositions. <https://geffstiubhairt.bandcamp.com>

The Jumping Off Point and Other Moments of Grace (Full band 2005-2008)

Recordings from 2001-2008 can be found:
<https://soulgasmrecords.bandcamp.com/>

Magic Gurney Ride (2006-2008)

Mostly original singer songwriter folk rock influenced trio consisting of
Geffery Cassuto - Guitar, Vocals
Rupert Wondolowski - guitar, vocals
Chuck Gross - bass, backing vocals, production
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKCBfQPZaiI&t=5s>

-Leonard Cohen Traffic Jam (2007)

Full length CD, engineered and produced by Chuck Gross
(out of print)

Baltimore String Felons

2008-2015
CD Full Lengths are out of print Sample tracks can be found here:
<https://www.facebook.com/baltimorestringfelons/>

-The Legend of Hardy Foster (2011)

Full Length CD, engineered and produced by Chris Hisey
In The Mode of Passion Recordings/Soulgasm Records

-Roaches, Lice, Bedbugs, Mice (2012)

Full Length CD engineer and produced by Geff Cassuto

Press Quotes:

"Fantastic timelessly weird old American folk music with a punk edge..."
-Rupert Wondolowski (Shattered Wig Press/Normals Books & Records)

"Earlier in the night, the Baltimore String Felons offered their own unique twist on folk traditions, theirs being more distinctly American. And what's so refreshing about the weirdo folk acts in Maryland, as opposed to say New York or California, is that we're not so far from Appalachia that the musicians seem more connected to those influences, and more likely to have actual family roots. The String Felons, with their fiddle and banjo twang, have a definite mountain sound in their so-called "inner city doomgrass," even with its oddball twists, including songs that detail the assassination of JFK or choruses that howl "please don't kill me." And like Balti Mare, the combination of tradition and playful irreverence is what makes the String Felons work... The Baltimore String Felons (also known as the Felon Family) were very much in keeping with the weirdo folk music theme of the rest of the bill, and were perhaps the best band of the bunch. The acoustic quintet's three string players switched between different combinations of guitar, banjo, mandolin, bass guitar, and violin-excuse me, fiddle. Meanwhile, one percussionist shook a tambourine and occasionally banged on a bass drum, and another played the spoons. As audience members stomped and danced, the String Felons alternated traditional songs with originals such as the rousing "Mighty Metal Mare." -Al Shipley, Baltimore City Paper

"With so many groups falling over each other to recapture the spirit of Appalachian folk, it's thrilling when a modern act can convey the necessary grit to make the music sound real. On record, The Baltimore String Felons truly sound like ghosts from another time. But the band's edge doesn't come from sonics alone. Appalachia may seem exotic to us, but the Felons have a subtle, more lifelike way of embracing darkness, and their music amounts to way more than just a pose. Three string players switch off on different combinations of banjo, violin, guitar, and mandolin, while two percussionists provide spoons, tambourine, and dusty kick drum. Sparks will fly if the Felons sound nearly as un-polished in person as they do on record."
-Rochester City paper

Luminescent Street Brigade (2016) -Demo 2016

Engineered and Produced by Geffery Cassuto:
<https://luminescentstreetbrigade.bandcamp.com>
Live performance at Light City Arts Festival April 2016 (myself on violin):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djd7SLq5Mgw>

The Wrong Side of Dawn (2015) -Live Demo

Recorded and produced by Geffery Cassuto
Geffery Cassuto - Vocals, Guitar, Mandolin,
Fiddle Bryce Malys - Vocals, Accordion,
Mandolin
<https://thewrongsideofdawn.bandcamp.com>

Dead Whale (2016 - present)

- S/T Cassette
Recorded by Geffery Cassuto, Mixed by Andi Scotti, Mastered by Mike Walls
Madi Shapiro - Vocals, guitar Geff Stewart - Violin, Vocals

Before The Apocalypse (2017)

Geff Stewart and Jan Rogalski Instrumental Guitar Duets:
-Rough tracks from unfinished Full Length Album recorded by Anthony Staiti:
<https://soundcloud.com/geffstiubhairt/sets/before-the-apocalypse>

I have also recorded/played with Baltimore groups/musicians such as
Dan Hanrahan, Sea Couch, Mole Suit Choir, Little Gruntpack, Her Fantastic Cats, Forks of Ivy, Kenneth Johnston

Education

Northeast High School
1121 Duvall Highway
Pasadena MD 21122
Graduated 2003

Peacework Farm
2231 Welcher Rd
Newark, NY 14513
Graduated Organic Farming Internship
2010

Employment History

Normals Books and Records, Baltimore, Maryland
425 E. 31st St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
Fill-In Clerk 2011- Present phone, register, clean, and file
and organize books and records

Hostel International Baltimore
17 W. Mulberry St
Baltimore, MD 21201
Front Desk Clerk 2017-
present

Charmington's Cafe
2601 N. Howard St.
Baltimore, MD 21211
Barista/Food
April 2016-June 2017

References

Rupert Wondolowski
Employer, Normals Books and Records
425 E. 31st Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA
410.243.6888 rwondolowski@yahoo.com

Greg Hatem former bandmate owner of
Bizarre Baltimore 410.913.6645

Kenneth Johnston
Longtime friend solo one man band (formerly known as the Bow-Legged Gorilla)
443.927.6262