

The Director's Mind

Hot Flashes Ignite New England *by Devin Travers*

GLASTONBURY, CT: What do bluegrass sound, American swing and old cowboy songs have in common? They are all elements of the eclectic repertoire favored by the pleasing harmonies of Amy Gallatin, Peggy Ann Harvey and Gayle Wade.

Affectionately known as the Hot Flashes, this Connecticut-based trio brings together performances that include strengths offered through their individual experiences, resulting in some surprising blending. A joke involving the relative age average of the ladies spawned the label, and when asked what name the trio would be going by - it stuck.

The Hot Flashes emerged in 2002, after the friends made several appearances together during guest performances with Amy's band, Stillwaters. Headed up by longtime classic western performer, Amy Gallatin, the Flashes group also includes Kevin Lynch on mandolin and guitar, and John Urbanik on stand up bass.

The band, and often just the trio, have been performing all over New England in recent months at festivals, coffeehouses, and on live radio spots, while preparing for their first European tour.

Amy Gallatin, is no stranger to touring Europe (or Mexico and the U.S.). In the latter part of the '90s, with her band, Stillwaters, Amy toured in The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Denmark, and represented the United States at the European World of Bluegrass convention in May 1998.

Though born in Alabama, Amy was raised in the West, with ten years in Idaho and Montana that would shape her life around the things she loves most - horses and music. She cut her performing teeth by entertaining tourists at guest ranches with her styled arrangements of the songs cowboys used to sing, like "I'm An Old Cowhand From The Rio Grande".

Her musical career evolved into bluegrass (guitar), and while wintering in New England in 1992, developed friendships with Peggy Ann Harvey and Gayle Wade. This led to meeting Traver Hollow's former member Kevin Lynch. Amy's first CD, *Northern Girl*, includes contributions by Kevin. The road leading to the album resulted in a permanent transplantation to New England for Amy, where she knew her heart belonged.

In the 1980's, when women in bluegrass were still a phenomenon, Peggy Ann Harvey was the reigning New England fiddler diva. Along with husband Paul Harvey, Peggy has made her mark with the Traver Hollow bluegrass band as a founding member, and is still an active performing and recording member of Traver Hollow (www.traverhollow.com).

Trained as a classical clarinetist, Harvey also plays piano, saxophone, flute, autoharp and fiddle. "I never felt I belonged playing in a symphony, though I love to play music," says Harvey. "I continue to play the classical instruments, through after becoming involved with Paul and Kevin in bluegrass music, I learned to play the fiddle. It was the hardest instrument I have ever learned."

By trade, Peggy is a pharmacologist, and pursues the music she loves as a hobby. During a Hot Flashes show, it is likely you will hear at least the fiddle, autoharp and a saxophone. She has played alongside such greats as Vassar Clements and Kenny Baker. She and Paul were Pickin' In The Pines' Entertainers of the Year in 1994.

Kevin Lynch was also a member of Traver Hollow, from 1980 through 1990, and is well known for his in-demand mandolin and guitar talents. He has performed extensively in the US, Europe, Mexico and Canada. Kevin's special talents include recording equipment expertise and he has worked on a number of projects with other musicians. He hosts a weekly bluegrass radio show on WWUH (91.3 FM) in West Hartford and has co-produced several festivals and concerts. Kevin is a board member of the Connecticut Bluegrass Music Association and was invited to join the advisory board of the Bill Monroe Foundation.

Singer-songwriter and awesome guitarist Gayle Wade, joined the group informally at first, jamming with Amy and Peggy. Some of Gayle's original contemporary songs are showcased in the Flashes repertoire. Her commanding vocal style and range blends superbly with Amy's (higher) and Peggy's (lower) sounds to create powerful but pleasing three-part harmonies that would have given the Andrew Sisters a run for the money. Her specialties are blues and swing classics.

Perhaps this is one reason why it was so natu-

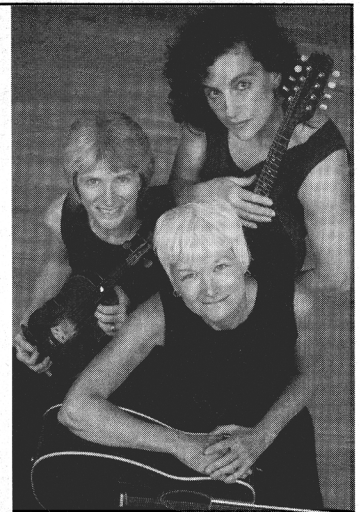
ral for swing to incorporate into the developing style of the band. While the Flashes repertoire is based largely on bluegrass and classic ballads, it is not at all uncommon to hear a tune from the cattle drive era followed by an acoustic swing number like "Choo Choo Cha Boogie". All together it forms the unique sound they have termed "Flashgrass".

According to Gallatin, the swing style found its way into the shows when Peggy insisted on finding a way to bring her saxophone into the act. The traditional bluegrass format of Traver Hollow did not allow for it, but the easy-going style developing among the fledgling Flashes offered opportunities for experimentation. The resulting mixture of their harmony and traditional bluegrass instruments (like guitar, mandolin, and stand up bass) with the brassiness of the saxophone is irresistible.

Part of the glue which cements the diverse musical styles together, is the strong bassline, which sets each piece in its own place. "I insist on an acoustic stand-up bass," states Gallatin, "and finding a great bass player is difficult. We are lucky to have John with us now."

Urbanik adapts the bass to the various numbers with the ease of someone who has worked with rhythm all his life. For many years he co-owned and operated Cardinal Sound (for concerts and festivals) and was formerly a drummer. He now sets the pace on the acoustic bass, and occasionally fills out the harmonies with a layer of his own.

The Flashes love to play at festivals and can sometimes be found demonstrating harmony techniques at festival workshops. They recall when a magazine article listing of women in bluegrass contained only a short list of names, and are today thrilled to be participating in the women in bluegrass evening at the Podunk Bluegrass Festival in East Hartford on July 1st.



The songs you will hear are a pleasing mix of classic tunes, jazzed up versions of timeless melodies, and original contemporary songs - like Gayle's touching tribute to her own family, "Anna's Owl". Music has no expiration date, and these ladies prove anything can be artfully combined and brought out beautifully through a variety of instruments that might be uncommon to another, but are well-suited for the band's sound.

Their current schedule, as they return from Europe, contains several summer opportunities to catch a Flashes show. Visit the Hot Flashes web page on Gallatin's site for sound clips and information about the band's plans - www.amygallatin.com/hotflashes.htm. While in Europe, some live performances will be recorded and it is hoped the tracks will find their way to a future CD compilation. However you hear the Flashes, you will find yourself moved by the sheer beauty of the music and the excitement that surrounds them.