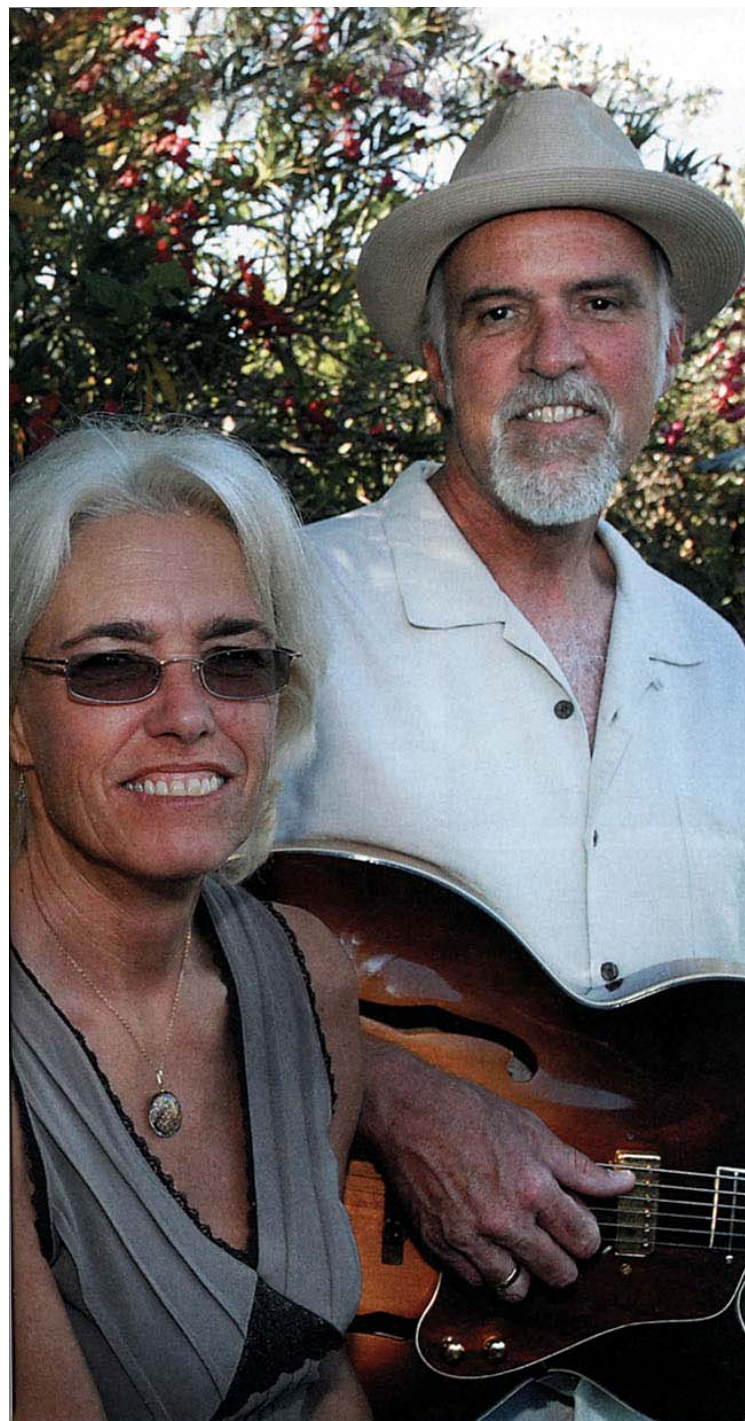


Diggin' those roots

THE ARTIFACTS
MINE AN ECLECTIC
MUSICAL MÉLANGE



The Artifacts (left to right): Dorian Bartley, Karen Tamborski and Stephen Tamborski.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

STORY BY GREG CAHILL
PHOTOS BY ROBERT VENTE

When multi-instrumentalist and singer Stephen Tamborski boasts that the Artifacts offer "sound evidence of diverse musical cultures," he means it. Just groove to this Petaluma trio's acoustic rendition of surf-king Dick Dale's seminal rock instrumental "Miserlou" slowed to a haunting ballad and mined for its mystic Middle Eastern roots.

"I'm a fan of [Nubian oud master] Hamza al Din," Tamborski explains. "I love that low lonesome oud sound – the cosmic drone. Those Middle-Eastern scales resonate with my Eastern European genes. I like to play it on the mandola with its lower throatier voice."

The Artifacts – Tamborski, a utility company employee; his wife Karen, a special education teacher, on vocals and percussion; and bassist and vocalist Dorian Bartley, a local music teacher; Petaluma residents all – have been a part of the North Bay music scene for 14 years, playing local cafes, dance parties and private events. Their eclectic sound is a pleasing mix of laid back rhythms, heavenly harmonies, front-porch picking and trippy repartee – what Tamborski describes as "late-night free-form FM radio hosted by a slightly inebriated DJ."

Country and western, R&B, surf, swing, Gypsy jazz – it all fits into the Artifacts' bohemian groove.

Their story starts 25 years ago when Tamborski began collaborating with long-time North Beach musician and songwriter Jack "Applejack" Walroth, a founding member of the legendary Chicago Blues Power band who co-wrote two songs with crooner Boz Scaggs. "He wrote our signature song, the Republic of California del Norte national anthem 'California del Norte,'" Tamborski says of Walroth. "At that time, we were performing as a duo, with Karen sitting in occasionally on vocals and percussion."

Bartley entered the picture after meeting Stephen Tamborski at the Point Reyes Dance Palace during a children's song workshop, where Tamborski's daughter Tanya was giving a recital.

"Stephen had been drafted to accompany the children with his mandolin on a set of early American Stephen Foster tunes," Bartley says. "I liked his approach to the music and was inspired to introduce myself and try to get something going. It seems that I met him at a moment of great possibility, soon after he had developed some regret regarding the sound equipment he had stored in his closet."

Bartley's first gig with the group was at the 1993 Petaluma River Festival.

Walroth soon grew tired of the commute from San Francisco and bowed out. The

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Artifacts has persevered as a trio, one that has no commercial CD release and performs only a handful of shows each year. Yet the trio continues to draw a faithful following.

"I love playing with my bandmates," Bartley says. "Stephen is a delightfully inventive player with a lot of soul. He brings musical nuance and control to our project and bears the responsibility of a lead instrumentalist with skill. Karen communicates a fierceness in the band and I admire the way she commits herself to a song, to a course of action."

"There's a lot of fire in that woman and, as a bass player, I benefit from the strength of her percussion."

Karen Tamborski agrees that the group's creative chemistry is a key reason for its longevity. "Each performance enhances us as a group, inspires us to delve deeper and to diversify," she says. "The gig is not to just play the performance but to include people for the relationships and enjoyment of being a part of other's lives and the stories they have to tell. We have played gigs for people who have seen us grow since our conception. They have been living with us through thick and thin, a bonding of life's experiences and appreciations through time."

"I hope it goes on forever!"



Stephen Tamborski performs with the Artifacts at the Art & Garden Festival in July 2005.



Dorian Bartley fingers her upright bass.

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