

Articles

Once More, with FEELING

Hunting for immediacy & emotion with St. Augustine singer, songwriter and revered guitarist Sam Pacetti

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When I moved to St. Augustine in 2001, the best way to find out about weekly gigs was the old-fashioned way: in print (Folio Weekly specifically) and by word of mouth. As a voracious FW reader, I noted all the regular names at the regular bars I loved. But one artist came to me wholly through giddy recommendations given in worshipful whispers: “You have to see Sam Pacetti at the Mill Top on Wednesdays.”

As many musicians in St. Augustine did then and still do today, Pacetti performed solo, with an acoustic guitar. But what he did with that guitar was rhapsodic: a fingerstyle technique hailed by critics and fans alike as revelatory upon the 1997 release of his album *Solitary Travel*. He inherited a masterful ability to spin a fanciful yarn after spending a year with Florida folk legend Gamble Rogers. Sam’s Cuban grandfather imparted flamenco influences; a year in Ireland enhanced his love of Celtic tradition. Stints in Chicago and Virginia strengthened Pacetti’s consummate grasp of the American primitive guitar style.

In short, Pacetti has built an aura celebrated both here in the Ancient City and anywhere folk enthusiasts trade their own Top Five lists. Equal parts spiritual, mystical and intense, it’s an ambience impossible to capture in a column or review—you truly have to see it to believe it. Even better, feel it—the resonant intimacy of Sam’s florid technique burrowing into your chest, his razor-sharp, sage-like wit sinking into your consciousness. I’ve spent years listening to his albums, reading his interviews and following his intermittent tour dates, all while acknowledging that, like the best artists, Sam Pacetti for me will always represent a time and a place—that moment when St. Augustine’s creative possibilities seemed limitless and I felt, drunk on strong Mill Top drinks and staring starry-eyed out over the Castillo de San Marcos to the Atlantic Ocean, upon which Pacetti’s Minorcan forebears came in the 1700s, like I had finally found a home. As Sam reminded me in this interview for Folio Weekly, mundane information has nothing on visceral emotion, even when it’s melted into the haze of nostalgia.

Folio Weekly: You’ve been through a lot lately, Sam—our condolences on the death of your mother.

Sam Pacetti: That was certainly meant to be—what a strange synchronicity, my mother’s name being Irma and her passing while the storm was right on top of us. I have really strong beliefs about what’s in store, so I think she’s on another journey.

Folio Weekly: What journey is Sam Pacetti on right now?

Sam Pacetti: That’s a difficult question and I don’t have a clear, concise, coherent answer to it. Right now, I’m in the Carolina Highlands on a bit of a quest. Many years ago, I had an incredibly intense experience of what Carl Jung might call the numinous, or the deep unconscious making itself manifest. I didn’t have the skill set at the time to understand what had happened, so I shut it off and compartmentalized it. About five or six years after that, I lost interest in music—I saw that I was going to have to make sacrifices that I wasn’t willing to make, and I didn’t possess the maturity to do it. So I walked away. I essentially lost my vision and my sense of vitality. I floundered for a period of time. But the magic came back.



Folio Weekly: A mid-life crisis, perhaps?

Sam Pacetti: In Western terms, yes. Or an existential crisis of meaning. As Goethe said, for a person who's been imbued with certain gifts, their greatest joy will be found in using those gifts to the best of their ability. I'm most interested in healing. Our world has a lot of healing to do—certainly in Western culture, where so much has been suppressed in the psyche. There's so much that's seeking to come to the surface. We would call this, perhaps, shadow material: the loathsome, terrifying, dark, diabolical, malevolent, unbalanced, infantile, repressed parts of human consciousness. This is the mythological journey of going down into the underworld and attempting to come back up as a more integrated and more whole being.

Folio Weekly: Not an easy thing to accomplish. How does that translate to your music?

Sam Pacetti: What I'm attempting to do in shows these days is to create an environment where we might energetically explore these ideas in a relatively safe space, but without too much language. Let people feel their way into some of this stuff. That's the big issue in the West—we've killed intuition, creativity and imagination. We've abdicated our personal power and vitality; we're a culture desperately searching for meaning. I want more immediacy and feeling. As she was discovering her own creativity, Joni Mitchell said that she knew how she felt, and she knew she wanted to bring those emotions—those nebulous feelings—into her music. That's where music does its work; that's where it cuts into someone. That's what art is supposed to do. Get us out of our heads and back into our hearts.

fingerstyleguitarists.com

Sam Pacetti is one of those musicians who elicits quiet, reverent whispers when other, great fingerstylists gather around the campfire and talk shop.

First Coast Magazine

Like all good storytellers, he has a talent for finding poetic, even mystical weight, in seemingly ordinary events.

Matthew Shaw
First Coast Magazine

Whoa

Ten Years ago Sam Pacetti released "Solitary Travel." He won "Best New Artist" at Falcon Ridge. He was 22. Unfortunately, over the past decade he's been hanging more drywall than playing music. The other day while working on future playlists, I put on "Union," the new one with partner Gabriel Valla. Whoa. One song after another, I could not concentrate on my computer screen.

See full article here: http://www.folkalley.com/legacy/archives/000776.php?entry_id=776

Jim Blum
Folk Alley Blog

Blazing His Own Formidable Trails

"Although the woods are full of young guitar virtuosos, few have developed the style, technique and artistic wisdom of Sam Pacetti. Solitary Travel, Pacetti's first release, portrays his influences from both sides of the Atlantic, but also finds him blazing his own formidable trails... Solitary Travel heralds the arrival of one of the most talented instrumentalists and composers to appear in acoustic music in a month of Sundays."

Michael Parrish

Dirty Linen

Deft Artistry

Enter Sam Pacetti, whose musical stylings and deft fingerpicking have taken the folk music world by storm... his talents and dexterity around the guitar's fretboard have been heralded by critics and fellow musicians alike.

|| Martin Bartels

|| St. Paul Pioneer Press

Fingerstyle Wizardry

(At Falcon Ridge) among my particular favorites was singer, songwriter and fingerstyle-guitarist extraordinaire Sam Pacetti. I had the opportunity a few months ago to catch Pacetti, and he blew me away. If you closed your eyes on 'Dueling Banjos,' you'd never know that this was one young man on one guitar. And that's the simple stuff. Pacetti's debut album (Solitary Travel, Waterbug Records) is filled with nothing less than fingerstyle wizardry - accomplished for the most part live to tape and in one take. Trust me, this is no easy feat."

|| Terry Lagerstedt

|| Fairfield, CT Weekly

The Absolute Soul of the Acoustic Guitar

If ever the absolute soul of the acoustic guitar could be conjured effortlessly by anyone's

fingers, it is those of Sam Pacetti... his unique gift brings the noble tradition of American Folk Music out of the archives.

|| Arvid Smith
|| MUSIC

Very Good, Indeed

This guy is very good, indeed... Here we have real tunes, with real phrasing and spaces between the notes that make sense. Nothing is gratuitously flash, but if you know your way around a fretboard, you know that this is deceptive. The little passing twiddles that wend their way through the tunes illuminate, rather than irritate, and this never descends into "textural" playing. Every tune and song has a firm backbone of a melody.

|| Alan Murray
|| Folk Roots

A Stone Knockout

*This is a serious talent on the first blips of a skyrocketing arc. His debut recording, *Solitary Travel*, is a stone knockout.*

|| Stageside (Iowa City Newspaper)

Guitaring the Way it Should be Done

In the instrumental tradition of Chet Atkins, Joe Maphis and John Fahey, Pacetti is guitaring the way it should be done. As a balladeer, he touches Fred Neil or Tim Hardin. It's rare when a performer combines the head and heart with such consummate chops.

|| Arvid Smith

A Major Talent in the World

Solitary Travel marks the debut of a major talent in the world. If Kottke, Fahey and Procter are household names where you live, consider getting familiar with Sam Pacetti's work.

This young guitarist is an enormous talent. Whether playing a reel, covering Martin Simpson or dishing out a ravishing original, Pacetti is a simply astonishing guitarist."

|| Eric Fidler
|| AP

A Vivid and Endearing Presence

"It is the combination of subtleties that make Sam Pacetti one of the most intriguing and talked about acoustic guitarists today... he is truly a vivid and endearing presence."

|| Mark Falkner
|| Florida Times Union

Pacetti is a Simply Astonishing Guitarist

"This young guitarist is an enormous talent. Whether playing a reel, covering Martin Simpson or dishing out a ravishing original, Pacetti is a simply astonishing guitarist."

Eric Fidler
Associated Press
