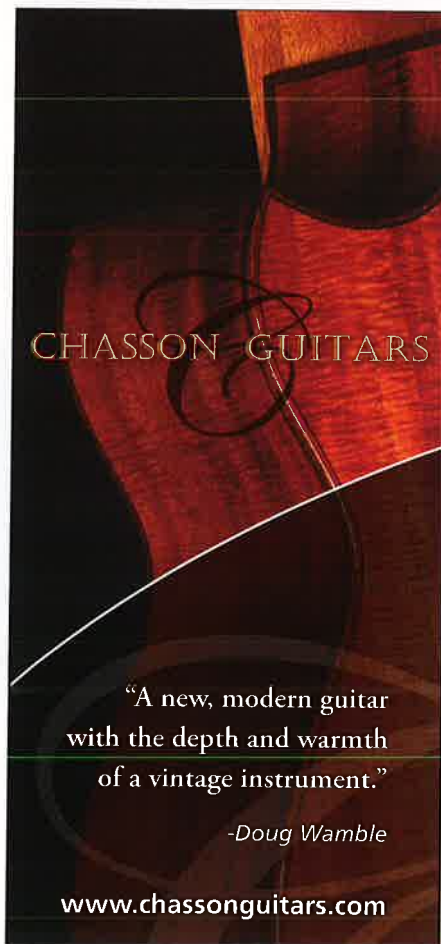


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The Giving Tree Band

Rootsy, timeless acoustic music from an eight-piece ensemble with a focus on sustainable living.

By Céline Keating

FORMED IN 2004 BY BROTHERS Todd Fink (banjo, vocals) and Eric Fink (guitar, vocals), the Giving Tree Band gathered members until it reached the uncommon size of eight with the release of its third album, *The Joke, the Threat, the Obvious*. Called the "greenest band in the land" by *Mother Earth News*, the band aspires to an environmental ethos that is equally outsize: record production is carbon-neutral, a biodiesel van transports the band, and their instruments are made from naturally fallen trees and reclaimed woods. The album even lists a "director of sustainability" (Cara Wasielewski).

The group—which also includes Patrick Burke (vocals, upright bass), Philip Roach (vocals, violin), Andy Goss (vocals, guitar), Erik Norman (vocals, mandolin), Scott Woods (vocals, slide guitar), and Justin Forsythe (drums)—is sustainable in its lifestyle, too, living and recording together under one roof in Yorkville, Illinois. "We try to share everything," Eric Fink says. "We really do have this brotherhood—we're a family."

Musical influences are equally broad, harkening back to a wide swath of the classic rock pantheon—such as Neil Young, Bob Dylan, the Band, the Grateful Dead, and the Beatles—but with a fuller sound featuring quasi-orchestral instrumentation and



The Giving Tree Band, from left: Erik Norman (mandolin), Justin Forsythe (drums), Patrick Burke (bass), Eric Fink (guitar), Todd Fink (banjo), Philip Roach (violin), Scott Woods (slide guitar), and Andy Goss (guitar).

TRACY GRAHAM

barbershop-octet harmonies. "I had always heard this big sound in my head," says Eric Fink, who produced the album. "For acoustic music it rocks pretty hard."

The Joke flawlessly incorporates jaunty jigs (the bluegrass "Red Leaves"); medium-tempo pop ("Circles"); and lovely slow ballads and waltzes, such as "Empty," "Reflections of My Soul," and "Take My Place," with its evocative guitar, harmony, and melody reminiscent of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. The

The band's mission is environmental stewardship—record production is carbon neutral, they travel in a biodiesel-fueled van, and their instruments are made from reclaimed woods.

lyrics can be wryly humorous or bittersweet, with storytelling elements that reference difficult circumstances or personal travails ("I've got more fences than a county line" from "Caged Lion"). Often a single instrument begins a piece, is joined by another and then another, with riffs and countermelodies piling up. "A lot of that comes from influences like

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, or even George Harrison, where there's a repeating theme and it's harmonized and complemented," Eric Fink says.

Eric Fink feels that the band's sound owes a great deal to the special qualities of their instruments. His guitar, the mandolin, and the slide guitar were all made by luthier Jason Harshbarger (see "What They Play" on this page), the banjo is vintage, and the upright bass is a Kay from the late '40s that was in pieces and that the band had put back together. Eric Fink's guitar features walnut back and sides, a spruce top, and an angular shape. "It's got this lower response but sparkle and punch, too," he says. "It suits the way I play,

with the heavy chunking and hammer-ons."

That intimate connection—with the wood, with each other, with the music—is the goal. "Virtuosity isn't necessarily for us this unbelievable technical prowess. It's having that sense of virtue and integrity and art and human quality," Eric Fink says. "There's something different between [simply] playing it right and *really* playing it. It's the heart and soul that's put into it." **AG**

Céline Keating is a writer and editor living in New York City. Keating regularly reviews albums for Acoustic Guitar and other magazines and studies classical guitar. Her novel, Layla, is forthcoming.

WHAT THEY PLAY

ERIC FINK

- **GUITAR:** Custom Highland Strings Aurvandil (aka "The Bear Guitar"), handmade by Jason Harshbarger. Naturally wind-fallen walnut back and sides and spruce top with nontoxic waterborne lacquer finish.
- **STRINGS:** John Pearse 80/20 bronze 200L Light.
- **AMPLIFICATION:** L.R. Baggs M1 passive pickup. Walter Woods Amber Light Super amp. Raezer's Edge Stealth 12ER cabinet.
- **CAPO:** G7th.
- **ACCESSORIES:** Steve Clayton medium Eco-Pick. Keeley Compressor stompbox.

SCOTT WOODS

- **SLIDE GUITAR:** Custom Highland Strings Moe'uhane Wa'a (aka "The Harshenborn"), handmade by Jason Harshbarger. River-reclaimed sinker redwood back, sides, and top with nontoxic waterborne lacquer finish.
- **STRINGS:** John Pearse Resophonic phosphor bronze.
- **AMPLIFICATION:** Lace Ultra Slim Acoustic Sensor pickup. G.D. Walker Electronics Stereo Steel amplifier system.
- **CAPO:** Beard.
- **ACCESSORIES:** Stevens slide. Dunlop GCB-80 high gain volume pedal.



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