

Goldberger new release includes some surprises

Mike Balsom
Special to The Local

Niagara-on-the-Lake musical mainstay Steve Goldberger's new CD release, *All Roads Lead To You*, has a lot of what you might expect from the bassist and band leader, with some surprising song selections thrown in to shake things up.

Recorded over a two-year-plus period that began before the pandemic, the record was put together in his revamped Shed Studio on his NOTL property. About half of what you hear on its 13 tracks was recorded inside the facility, while many of the ever-expanding Gentle Spirits band and guests contributed their parts remotely.

Listening to the finished product, you'd never guess that all the musicians weren't in the same room when it was recorded. Goldberger's production skills, honed over many years building and rebuilding his studio and working with a slew of artists both local and beyond, tie it all together with a polished rootsy Americana feel that would fit right in with that radio format in the U.S.

The collection kicks off with two familiar classics, both of which jibe thematically with our current times, though they originally were recorded more than 50 years ago. *Something In the Air*, a

U.K. chart-topper in 1969 by the short-lived band Thunderclap Newman, is a song about revolution and rebellion, while Spirit's 1970 hit *Nature's Way* is an ecological anthem.

"They just happened to be appropriate," Goldberger laughs, "but I chose them because I just love them."

Something In the Air shows Goldberger's Tom Petty influence, with chiming guitars by Mike Glatt, Dave Norris keeping time and Steve handling bass, Hammond organ and mandola duties. NOTL cellist Helen Kopec helps him out on the low end, and plays a masterful, tasteful solo that makes this version of the song unique amongst the many that have been recorded.

Glatt adds slide guitar to *Nature's Way*, while Laurel Minnes of local acts Laurel & Hulley, Miniscule, and Majora contributes backing vocals.

True Love was a 1991 hit for country crooner Don Williams, written by Pat Alger. Serena Pryne of the Mandevilles harmonizes seamlessly with Goldberger here, while Jim Casson lays down the beat aided by Penner McKay on percussion.

Casson is back on the skins for the Bob McNiven-penned *One More Time*, along with the Waterloo-area outfit Western String Authority. It's a song that harkens back to Goldberger's



Steve Goldberger, in his newly revamped studio, has worked for two years complete his new CD.

almost two decades playing in the Toronto-based bluegrass band Black Creek.

"I was so lucky to get those guys to play on it," he says. "It's such a great song, and Bob was such a great songwriter."

McNiven, formerly of country-bluegrass bands Open Road and Whiskey Jack, and a regular on CBC-TV's Tommy Hunter Show,

was a close friend of Goldberger's. *One More Time* was McNiven's signature song, and clearly its inclusion on *All Roads Lead to You* is a labour of love for the bassist. McNiven lost his battle with ALS in 2020, and his death deeply affected Goldberger.

Goldberger dedicates the album to McNiven, singer-songwriter Nanci Griffith, who passed away

in 2021, and late Texas troubadour Guy Clark. All 13 songs on the album are covers, but many, such as the two Shawn Colvin numbers, Kim Richey's *Just My Luck* and a song by Griffith, are just about obscure enough that many might mistake them for Goldberger's own compositions.

"That's my favourite go-to," he says when asked

about his ongoing love of female singer-songwriters. "I just relate to them better. I have a dozen Kim Richey songs I want to do, and I may even do a whole Nanci Griffith record one day. The Shawn Colvin songs, those two just speak to me."

"I didn't have any new originals to put on there,"

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Lots of plans for other recordings in new studio

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he adds. “I just haven’t been writing lately. Redoing the studio took a lot of time, and just working on the songs too. My work flow method is probably not the way most people do it. I take a lot of time on each song and arrange it as I go.”

The self-professed ‘old hippie’ covers two Bob Dylan numbers on this release. His version of 1965’s *She Belongs to Me* is the

hardest rocking track on the disc, featuring Norris, Glatt and Andrew Aldridge on guitar. And Dave Matthews’ banjo work on *You’re Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go* steps up the country feel of one of the most country-style songs in Dylan’s canon.

Minnes returns along with Lisa Winn for harmony vocals on the Poco song *Keep On Trying*, written by Timothy B. Schmit of Eagles fame. And Steve picks up a ukulele for a slowed-

down version of the American classic *Sister Golden Hair*.

“It’s totally different, with a bit of a reggae beat,” Goldberger says. “If I’m going to do it, do it differently. When Cam (MacInnes) put that guitar part down it took it to a whole new level. I had a horn arrangement for it, but once he did that guitar arrangement I went with that instead.”

The record closes with a take on the Badfinger power-pop classic *No Matter What*, featuring Glatt play-

ing a ringing Byrds-style 12-string. The Goldberger version cuts away the wall-of-guitar bombast of the 1970 hit that was released on the Beatles’ Apple record label, instead giving the number more of a George Harrison feel.

Despite the older vintage of many of the songs covered on the collection, Goldberger is not one to decry the state of music today.

During the two-hour chat he raves about the fresh new work from veterans Robert Plant and Jackson Browne, and gets excited talking about Trombone Shorty and Britany Howard of Alabama Shakes. He also lays out his plans to see Browne on a double bill with James Taylor in Toronto in April.

And the question arises, of course, of the return to the Friday night Old Winos and Saturday night Niagara Rhythm Section gigs at The Old Winery. He’s itching to get back on stage after a two-year COVID-forced pandemic.

“We’re looking at April, hopefully,” he says. “But we do have some gigs scheduled. I have a duo set with Andrew (Aldridge) at the Vegan Hippie Chick (in Welland), and a concert in Ridgeway on July 10. There’s also a Jimmy Buffet show July 23, with the Niagara Reefers Band at Sherkston.”

With 22 musicians guesting on the new album and an open door policy on

stage over his entire 28 years living in town, it’s suggested that if anyone in Niagara deserves recognition for providing opportunities for local musicians to perform on stage and on record it’s Goldberger. He shakes off any acknowledgment for those efforts.

“They’re great musicians. Why not give them the opportunities?” he says. “I’m conscious of doing it, I want to. People like Mike Harrison of Mainline, Terry Wilkins of Lighthouse, they treated me like brothers in the early days. And Black Creek’s producer Syd Kessler taught me a lot in the studio, too.”

He’ll be twiddling the knobs at his Shed Studio for some upcoming recording sessions. Local poet Holmes Hooke, the former booking agent at Toronto’s Hugh’s Room, has scheduled time to record some of his spoken word work before his voice begins to decline. And fellow bass player Dave Leprich of the Brant Parker Band is planning to lay down some tracks for a project with his two daughters, Alana and Lauren. He’ll be playing guitar, while Alana will be handling bass and percussion duties. Lauren, who is a manager at Silver-smith, will be playing violin on the songs that Goldberger describes as rootsy, right up his alley.

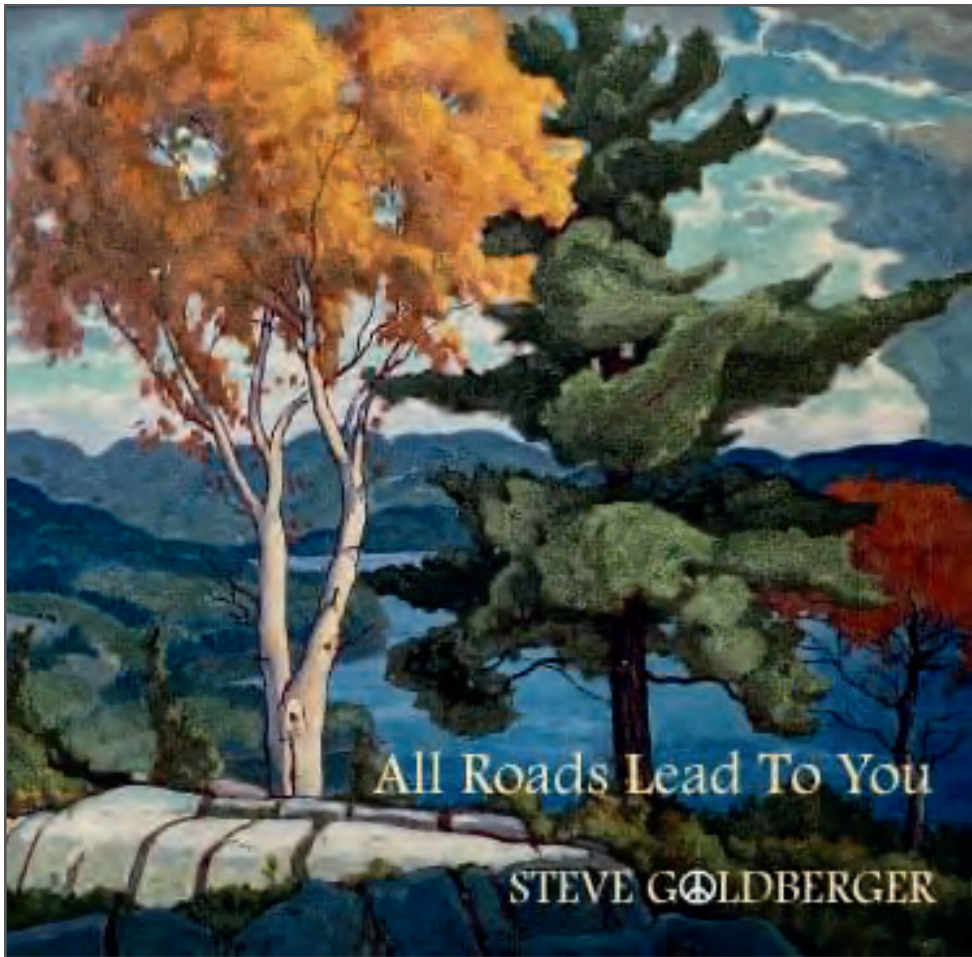
And lately, he’s been going through some old recordings from his Black

Creek days, which ran from around 1972 until 1989. The band played clubs, concerts and festivals, opening for the likes of Supertramp, Arlo Guthrie, Melanie and Lester Flatt. They even played a series of gigs with a troupe of performers called The Tramp Champs, who performed on trampoline while the band played *The Orange Blossom Special*. Some of the recordings capture the band in all its bluegrass, often-drunken glory on stage.

“The one from Georgian College, where we do that gospel thing,” he laughs, “the green room had so much booze and food. The drummer was really out of it. At the end of the last song he fell off the stool and passed out. We left him there on the stage.”

You can listen to his Black Creek recordings, including their lone RCA single *Bright Side of Tomorrow*, which won them a Genie Award for its inclusion in the Canadian movie *Lions for Breakfast*, on his Bandcamp page at stevegoldberger.bandcamp.com.

The new album *All Roads Lead To You* is out now on all major streaming platforms. The CDs, with an album cover designed by Goldberger from an original Frederick S. Haines landscape, should be available this week. Contact Goldberger at steve@stevegoldberger.com to get your copy.



Steve Goldberger’s new album cover, which he designed from an original painting.

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