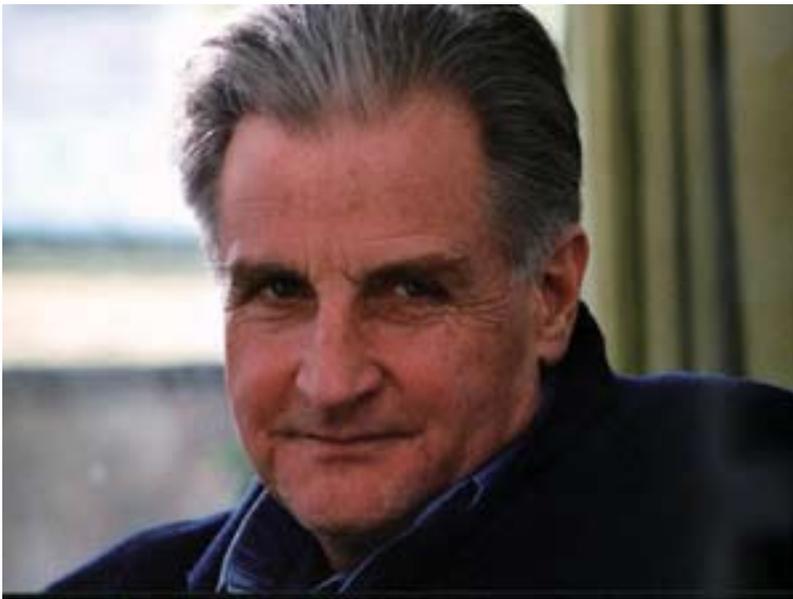


GEOFF MULDAUR

Say Mull, like hot mulled cider. Like “I’ll mull that over.” Say Door, like dream doors opening into rooms you didn’t know existed in your own house. Say Mull Door. Now you’ve pronounced Geoffrey Muldaur’s last name correctly. Garrison Keillor stumbles over it regularly on *Prairie Home Companion*, and we all got it wrong when then-wife Maria’s “Midnight At The Oasis” topped the charts. It comes from ancestors on the Muldau River, just one thread of the heritage that makes the complex personality Geoffrey Muldaur.



But if the world has trouble pronouncing his name, there is even more difficulty in classifying his prodigious talent. The more you learn about him, the more intrigued you will become.

I reached Muldaur in California on the eve of a tour that will bring him here to the Rosendale Cafe on April 3 and ultimately on to Ireland. He was in the middle of arranging some Bix Beiderbeck piano pieces for a

chamber group, which he’ll record in New York for his next CD. And he had just received a script from Disney for scoring a very big movie. But he was sanguine about getting back on the road, to experience what he called “the breadth of this troubadour life.” He said, “I love to play. Before I was a little shy, but now I just love it.”

Muldaur’s name has never been a household word but he’s been an important underground influence for almost 40 years. His reedy, rootsy voice is like no one else’s: instantly recognizable. Maybe you first heard him with The Kweskin Jug Band, that seminal sixties outfit, singing chills up your spine on “Wild about My Lovin’” and “Don’t You Leave Me Here.” Or perhaps you know the two Geoff and Maria albums: “Sweet Potatoes” and the haunting “Pottery Pie”, which contains “Brazil”, the seed for the classic Terry Gilliam movie. Or you might be aware that Geoff toured and recorded with Paul Butterfield’s Better Days, arguably Butter’s best band. Perhaps he only came in on your radar in 1998 and 2000 with a pair of critically acclaimed CD’s “The Secret Handshake” and “Password”.

But did you know that he was a successful software designer? Five years ago he was living in Detroit, wearing real good suits, hanging out with thugs and putting his kids through school. He said he spent five or six years designing software— an internet/computer pioneer “until the rest of the

world discovered it". (Now he's dropping out, doesn't even own a TV.) Among other things, he wrote a huge application running software that tracked steel coils for a steel company. But perhaps that's not so surprising.

"I found out that multidimensional thinking is innate in me," said Muldaur. "And designing software is like writing music. You have ten staff lines, a sense of what has to happen in speed, in volume, in harmony, in dynamics.... there were more musicians in the field than mathematicians!"

But then Bobby Neuwirth took him on tour in Italy and he began to play music again, software forsaken. The two Hi tone CD's succeed because of the many facets that come into play. Soulful singer; multi-instrumentalist; scholar of old music who can make it new in his own stew of gospel, folk, country and funk. His elegant, quirky arrangements are another element that makes Muldaur's music so unique. "Arranging is my first love, or gift," he said. "I pursue it. It's like ten times a crossword puzzle a day."

He's been at it a long time. "It goes back to the Jugband days. We did a lotta woodshedding in Cambridge. Working those jazz changes every night in back room parties. For nine years, every night.... And hearing people like John Coltrane in the clubs." He took some courses at Berklee too—in piano, alto sax and composition—but music seems to be instinctive in him. He is largely self-taught. "Things I can put in my mouth I can play. So guitar was an odd one."

As a kid he fell for traditional jazz and later doo wop. Remembers dancing to Jimmy Reed in Pelham NY. "There's nothing like that now." He sang in choirs and played clarinet. At 18, he took a train to New Orleans and got his first gig on Rampart Street. Cambridge was the heady discovery that "Hey, I'm crazy but there are other crazies!" And the Jug band. "We were the only band at the time that didn't have uniforms," he said. "The Grateful Dead were an electric extension."

Albert Grossman brought Geoff and Maria here in 1969, along with a stellar band that included Amos Garrett and Bill Keith. They were all supported for two years and played only two gigs in that time, he said. "What surprised me when we came to Woodstock was people were interested in what kind of car they had, not in jamming." But those two revered albums did come out of those Woodstock years. And what of the "Pottery Pie"—"Brazil" connection?

"When I met Terry Gilliam, he told me that they used to take the 'Pottery Pie' album and put it on in the Monty Python office and pray to it on their knees." There was a plan to make a record, every cut "Brazil" by a

different artist. But they never got to make it. Terry Gilliam didn't have final cut on the movie and the studio had butchered it. "After seeing that, he stole the director's cut, screened it at a festival and won. After that they couldn't use any other version. So it was, 'You'll never work in this town again!'"

It was in Woodstock too that Muldaur came to know and work with Butterfield. He terms the Better Days band, "an interesting iteration." In a hotel room in Cleveland, the Adderly brothers, (Nat and Cannonball) asked, "Do you know who you're playing with? Do you know who the f**k you're playing with?" And that was not so unusual. "Paul was so good, so musically evolved, it was shocking." Muldaur recalled. "No matter where you were, he'd take it up a notch in one masterful stroke. Only four notes and right into a groove."

Muldaur creates mesmerizing grooves all by himself. But you can discover this for yourself when he plays in Rosendale next Wednesday night. Only half an hour from Woodstock, the smokefree Cafe has really good vegetarian food and doubles as art gallery with a different show every month. Plan to go down early for dinner so you can get a good seat. In that intimate and comfortable atmosphere, his magic will cast its spell and it could be any decade at all.