



RAGGED UNION

RUNNING RAGGED

On the Cover



Geoff Union leads Ragged Union to the Front Range

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By Travis Lawson

Texas. Everything is bigger there. Except for its bluegrass scene, which recently saw one of their talents relocate to Colorado. In November of 2013, with a baby on the way, Geoff and his wife Christina headed to Colorado to begin a new version of Ragged Union. Formed initially in Texas, Geoff was looking to move his family and his career to Colorado, where Christina had been a musician prior to their meeting. The core of the band, in Geoff and Christina, was set to undertake the task of reforming in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

The task was made easier with the caliber of musicians he was able to recruit to perform in Ragged Union. Jordan Ramsey (mandolin) and Chris "C-Bob" Elliot (banjo) quickly joined the group, both of whom have been active in the local bluegrass scene for several years. Jordan spent time alongside banjo legend Pete Wernick in Long Road Home, while C-Bob was part of the talented young bluegrass band Spring Creek. The addition of these two former RockyGrass instrument champions sparked an immediate local awareness about the band.

Also relocating to Colorado from Indiana in the fall of 2013, Pat "Fiddle" Hoepfer

brings an electrifying presence and a Vassar Clements-influenced sound to the stage. And with the recent addition of highly sought after local bassist Andrew Bonnis, Geoff feels that the Union is complete.

Geoff had been a staple in the Austin music scene for years. Although he wasn't originally a bluegrass musician, he was drawn into the scene in the mid '90s. Several years later he joined Two High String Band with Billy Bright (former mandolinist with Tony Rice and Peter Rowan) and, joining later, Alan Munde (banjoist with Jimmy Martin). He toured with them for several years, recording a couple albums and performing at several festivals, some of which brought him to Colorado.

When Two High disbanded, Geoff continued to play various weekly gigs in Austin as he moved in his own direction, which included a country project for a while. In 2011, Geoff formed a loose version of Ragged Union. While playing with this new project, he was working on a solo album. In 2012, his 8-track original *Cold as Steel* was released, which included Billy Bright and Christina Union on the recording.

A year later, with their relocation to Colorado, they jumped right into the local music scene. Their new version of Ragged Union is performing regularly around

Colorado, and has already set their sights on performing nationally, as they have booked several festivals this summer, including the prestigious John Hartford Memorial Festival in Indiana.

The current sound of Ragged Union, as Geoff describes it, is still being sculpted. "Our music is still forming and direction is still taking shape, with a leg in the traditional bluegrass world and a toe in jamgrass," Geoff says. "We like to keep our shows upbeat and hard-driving."

Geoff brings some off-the-beaten-path traditional bluegrass covers to the band, as well as his original material. They have currently been putting together a new album up in Fort Collins at Swingfingers Recording Studio. *A Hard Row to Hoe* is a mix of several covers, with original songs by Geoff and Christina. Their originals, as Geoff puts it, aren't necessarily traditional bluegrass, because he hasn't suffered the hardships that those songs are based upon. Instead he takes his experiences and puts a "grassy spin" on them, as he wants to respect the genre.

I was fortunate to pick a few tunes with Geoff prior to our interview, and his comment

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about "hard-driving" is true. Although we stuck to traditional songs that the picking circle knew, one could feel the tempo increase and the energy flow when Geoff was leading the tune or ripping thru a solo. Smiles abounded and good times were had by all.

While I haven't caught the current configuration of Ragged Union live, as Bonnis was a recent addition, they have several Front Range shows coming up in the next few months. In Boulder you can catch them at the Bohemian Biergarten Jan 22, at Golden's Ullrgrass Festival Jan 31st, Colorado Spring's Black Rose Acoustic Society Feb 13th and Mid-Winter Bluegrass Festival in Denver Feb 20th. They are also featured at the Colorado Bluegrass Music Society's Bluegrass at the Audi series in Broomfield on Feb 28th. I'm excited to check out the new line up, hope to see you there!

