

Flatpick Highlight: David Maravilla

by Dan Miller

A few months ago several of my bluegrass friends in Missouri invited me to check out a Missouri flatpicker named David Maravilla. I searched on David's name on Youtube and I found a few videos of him performing with his band "Lonesome Road." I was very impressed with David's flatpicking and I also loved the band. When I told my friends that I was interested in featuring David in the magazine they let me know in advance that he was a quiet and humble guy. When I contacted David, I found out that he was indeed humble regarding his flatpicking skills. In his response to my request for an interview, David said, "I am flattered that you're asking, but I'm not sure that I'm qualified. I don't consider myself much of a flatpicker; I think I'm more of a rhythm player in a bluegrass band who takes breaks on occasion." After watching David on Youtube and listening to the band CD, I knew that he was indeed a good flatpicker. There was no question. My friends were correct in saying that David was a humble regarding his flatpicking skills. They were also correct in letting me know that this guy was a very talented bluegrass guitar player.

David grew up in St. Louis and started piano lessons at a young age, but said, "The piano didn't float my boat." He started playing the guitar in the early 1970s when he was around fourteen years old. Although he started on the acoustic guitar, he liked to listen to rock music and it wasn't long before he got an electric guitar. He took guitar lessons at a music store for a year or two, but said that most of his learning in those early days was as a result of listening to records. He said that although he learned from recordings, he did not learn to play the solos note-for-note. He would usually invent solos that were based on what he heard on the record.

Although David occasionally got together with friends to jam, most of his guitar playing during his high school years

consisted of solo practice. After completing high school in 1975, David attended college in Tampa, Florida.

In the summer of 1976, after his first year at college, David attended his first bluegrass festival in Farmington, Missouri. He said, "I had been to rock and roll shows, but I had never experienced anything like a bluegrass festival. I saw people standing around and jamming. That made an impression on me. After that experience I started listening to bluegrass and I got serious about my guitar playing. When I went back to school I found people in Florida who knew bluegrass and I started hanging around with them instead of studying. I was consumed by it. I used to write down on my calendar how many hours a day I was practicing. Sometimes it was all day."

When he started playing bluegrass guitar, David listened intently to both the rhythm and lead playing of Tony Rice, especially Tony's work with J. D. Crowe and the New South. David said, "I really liked Tony's playing. I was aware of Doc Watson and I also liked his playing, but he didn't impress me in the same way that Tony did." By 1978 David had joined his first bluegrass band.

After his second year of college in Florida, David moved back to Missouri. The leader of the first bluegrass band that David joined was fiddler Dub Crouch. Dub was the uncle of modern day bluegrass masters Tim and Dennis Crouch. David stayed with Dub Crouch's band through one festival season. He played both lead and rhythm guitar in that band. He then joined the band Frank Ray and Cedar Hill Grass. Both of his first two bands played regionally in the Midwest. In addition to playing the guitar David also sang some lead and harmony vocals in those bands.



David left Cedar Hill Grass when he got a job as a preacher in Fredericktown, Missouri. His new job didn't allow him time to perform in a band, but he still occasionally went to bluegrass festivals to pick with friends. After a few years in Fredericktown, David got a new preaching job back in the St. Louis area. In addition to his work as a preacher, David decided to open a music store, The Music Connection, with Frank Ray in DeSoto, Missouri. Once the store was up and running and he reconnected with music friends in the St. Louis area, David started playing music on a more regular basis.

In 1984 the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music in America (SPBGMA) held its first annual international band contest. The prize was significant enough that David and his friend Mike Harman (banjo-playing brother of flatpicker Bull Harman) decided to put a band together to enter the contest. They recruited their friend Rhonda Vincent to play mandolin and sing and also added bass and Dobro players. The band called itself Second Wind and placed second in the contest. The band played a few shows both before and after the contest, but did not continue playing together for very long.

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Two years after their original appearance at the SPBGMA band contest, Mike and David decided to put another band together. Since Rhonda's family band was performing at the SPBGMA event that year, she could not perform in the contest. Mike and David recruited a 15-year-old Alison Krauss to be a band member in 1986. The band, performing under the same band name, placed fourth that year. In 1987 David moved from the St. Louis area to Republic, Missouri, which is located just outside of Springfield.

From the age of twelve, Alison Krauss had played in a band with bassist John Pennell called Silver Rail. Later Pennell changed the name of the band to Union Station when he discovered that there was another band called Silver Rail. In 1988 Union Station was a four-piece band with Mike Harman on banjo. They decided that they would enter the SPBGMA band contest that year, but they wanted to expand their band to a five-piece band for the contest. Their regular guitar player moved over to play mandolin and they recruited David Maravilla to play the guitar. Union Station, with David on guitar, won the band contest that year.

In the early 1990s, David played in a band named Down the Road with Joe Winneman on mandolin and Joe's cousin Irl Hees on bass. David stayed with that band for about three or four years. In 1997 he joined the band Lonesome Road. This band included Rob Boone on banjo, David on guitar, Ron Pennington on mandolin and Shelly Smith on bass. These four band members have stayed together and are all still active in Lonesome Road (<http://www.lrband.com/>). They have produced four CDs to date and have toured the Midwest for the past 17 years.

Regarding his guitar playing, David said that when he first started playing the acoustic guitar, coming over from a rock and roll background, he played mostly improvised solos that were not very melodic. Today he says that he feels that his solos are based more on melody than on licks. Although David has always taken guitar solos in every band he has played in since 1978, he said, "Playing rhythm is way more important to a bluegrass band than taking solos."

Regarding rhythm playing in a bluegrass band, David said, "A rhythm guitar player in a bluegrass band has to know how to do more than just play a bass note and a strum. That is not the best kind of bluegrass band rhythm. There is more going on. There are

a lot of different patterns, hitting multiple strings, bass runs, filling in different parts of the beat, and mixing it all up."

When asked how one might best implement all of the various rhythm techniques that are available to the acoustic guitar player in the bluegrass band context, David said, "You have to get together with other people and play. You approach it by feel. You mess around when you are jamming and you feel when it is right. It is more of a feeling thing than a technical thing. But, you can't just play boom-swat."

Over the years David has collected a few really nice old guitars, his favorites being a 1941 Martin D-28 and a 1942 Martin D-18. He said that they are pretty beat-up and not really collector's items, but he likes the way they sound. He has owned the D-28 for about 20 years and he has had the D-18 for about ten years. He doesn't necessarily use one more than the other when he is performing or recording. When he is traveling and feels as though it will not be safe to take one of his older Martins—due to security, handling, or weather issues—he will take one of his other Martin guitars. He owns a beat-up 1955 D-28 and he owns several Martin guitars from the 1980s. David's newest guitar was built by luthier Ken Hooper (who was featured in the last issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*).

For your listening and playing pleasure, we have provided an audio reference of David's playing, and a transcription of his solo, from a Lonesome Road recording of the song "In the Mountains." When you listen to his track, I think you will see why my Missouri friends recommended that I take a listen to David's band and his flatpicking. It is great stuff! If you'd like to learn more about the band, please check out their website (<http://www.lrband.com/>).





Audio CD
Track 36

In The Mountains

Arranged by David Maravilla
Transcribed by Alois Kleewein

♩ = 234, capo 4

Chords: G G D D

bend/release

1 2 3 2 1 3 4 0 3 0 3 5 0 0 2 3 4 0 1 2 3 0 2 2 0 3 4 0

6 Chords: D D G G

choke bend/release

5 4 3 6 3 5 3 (3) 3 0 3 5 0 2 0 4 0 0 3 0 3 4 0 2 3 2 3 5 3 5

10 Chords: G G D D

3 5 5 5 3 5 3 2 3 0 1 2 0 2 3 0 3 0 2 2 3 2 0 3 0 3 5 0 6 7 5

14 Chords: D D G G Bb

bend/release

7 6 7 5 5 7 5 7 5 6 5 5 7 5 7 8 7 0 0 3 0 0 3 1 2 3 0 0 1 2 3



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