



# Ed Douglas: Living Legend of Local Music

by Lyle Duplessie

When you think of folk music, images rush to mind of New York's Greenwich Village or perhaps San Francisco's North Beach. And how about San Diego's Midway district? Yes, that's right, the Midway district! It's true. In the early '60s, San Diegan Ed Douglas was instrumental in creating a local folk scene, centering around the Blue Guitar, then located on Midway Drive. Soon after that he helped form what was perhaps San Diego's first bluegrass band, the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers. Besides Ed, other notables who played in the band included Chris Hillman, Bernie Leadon, Kenny Wertz, and Larry Murray. This is an account of the role Ed Douglas had in both.

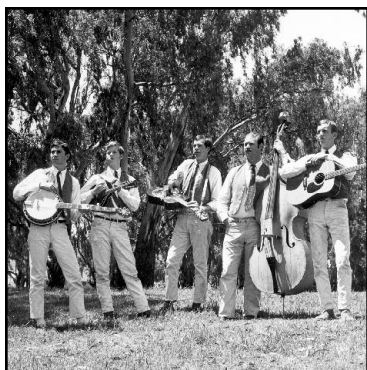
It was 1961 when Ed, a bored typewriter salesman, met Yuris Zeltins, a fledgling guitar builder and flamenco player, and Larry Murray, a San Diego State student. All three frequented a music store on University Avenue in North Park. Since the store owner didn't make the boys feel very welcome, Ed came up with the idea of opening their own guitar store. It wasn't long before Ed found an old shack of a place on Midway Drive. He remembers that half the floor space was dirt. Still, rent was cheap - \$90 a month, with the deal secured by a handshake. As Ed put it, now he and his friends had a place to hang out and a source for cheap guitar strings. After reading a Wallace Stevens poem, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," Ed found the appropriate name for the new guitar shop. Soon this funky little guitar store became the hang out for all the flamenco and esoteric folk artists in town. Since they had no business, everyone would sit around day and night and just pick.

Before long, Ed and Larry found their musical niche in bluegrass. With Ed on stand up bass and Larry on dobro, Kenny Wertz joined them on banjo and Gary Carr on guitar. Shortly thereafter, a 17-year-old lad named Chris Hillman was accepted into the group as their mandolin player.

The group still needed an appropriate-sounding name. Ed proposed the name the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers. The name sure had an authentic ring, but what did it mean? Ed explained that "squirrel barking" was the name given to a squirrel-hunting technique invented around the time of Daniel Boone and still practiced today. When a

hunter saw a squirrel in a tree, he would whistle. The squirrel would freeze on its branch and the hunter would aim his rifle at the bark on the branch where the squirrel stood. When the bullet hit the bark, it would blow the squirrel off the branch, which would land on the ground unconscious. The hunter would then have an unmarked squirrel with a lot more meat left on for the supper meal. Ed learned this technique first hand as a kid visiting his uncle's farm in Scottsville, Kentucky.

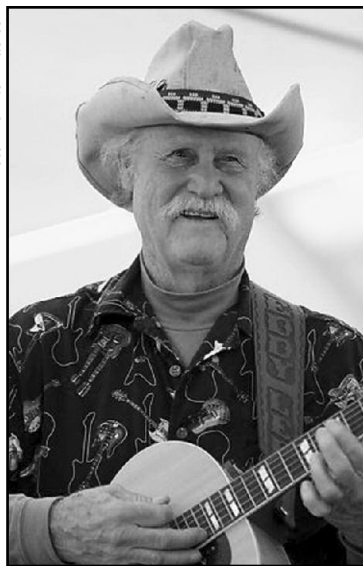
When the band got tight, the boys decided it was time to make an album. The Squirrel Barkers' first and only album, titled *Bluegrass Favorites with the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers*, was recorded at the Crown Records studio in L.A. The fact is, in the early '60s, every band worth a shuck felt it had to record an album, and Crown Records would record anyone. Ed recalled Crown as a low-budget outfit that recorded on poor-quality, recycled vinyl. Crown would sell their finished products at drug and grocery stores. Furthermore, all material had to be public domain to avoid royalty fees.



Promo photo for the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers, taken in the early 1960s

The recording process took four to five hours from start to finish. Pictures for the cover were taken at Griffith Park. Ed didn't remember receiving any money for recording. Instead, the band was paid in albums, which they in turn sold at gigs. Ed recounted that about a year later he ran across the same album, which was retitled *Bluegrass Favorites with the Kentucky Mountain Boys*. Later on, Crown Records was sold to a Japanese company that released the album with the sleeve written in Japanese. Eventually the

Photo: Dennis Andersen



Ed Douglas

masters wound up in the hands of an English label. After almost 40 years, the Squirrel Barkers' album can once again be heard in CD format, with much improved fidelity over the original vinyl, available through Amazon.

By '65, the times, they were a-changing. The musical direction brought about by the Beatles, and the political climate created by the Vietnam War spelled an end to the acoustic folk scene. But what a scene it had been! Many musical careers were influenced by the Blue Guitar on Midway Drive. Around 1965 many Blue Guitar locals set off to L.A. in search of better opportunities, and many scored big time. Chris Hillman became a founding member of the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, and the Desert Rose Band, as well as a key member of Manassas and Souther-Hillman-Furay, and cut several solo and collaborative albums as well. Larry Murray served as emcee at the Troubadour in L.A., worked with the band Hearts and Flowers, and became a writer for the Smothers Brothers, Johnny Cash, and Glen Campbell TV shows. Kenny Wertz became a renowned world-class banjo picker. Bernie Leadon played in Linda Ronstadt's backup band, was a member of the Dillard and Clark Expedition, served as a Flying Burrito Brother, and spent some time in the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. But the crown jewel of his success was his role as a founding member of the Eagles. Mason

Williams was another Blue Guitar alumnus who scored a major hit with his guitar tune "Classical Gas." He then went on to work for the Smothers Brothers.

The Blue Guitar continues to serve local pickers in the community, but at its current digs on Mission Gorge Road. Yuris Zeltins remains a fixture there and is recognized by many as truly a master luthier of the highest stature, world-renowned indeed.

And what about our hero Ed Douglas? He, too, moved to Los Angeles around 1965. While in L.A., he made a living by managing bands. Tiring of the L.A. scene, he moved back to San Diego in 1968. He helped open a new Blue Guitar in Old Town and began selling his hand-tooled leatherworks there. In 1972, he turned his share of the store over to Yuris. Since then, Ed has been a general contractor, carpenter, leather smith, and world traveler. In 1981, Ed moved back to San Diego and took his hobby of leather craft to a new professional level. With 200 leather purses adorning his bedroom, plus hundreds of other hand-tooled goods taking up space in his house, Ed decided to open another shop.

The preceding is a reprint of an article, which appeared in the December 2001 issue of the *San Diego Troubadour* and was written by the late great Lyle Duplessie.



Inside the Double Eagle at 3331 Adams Avenue

So, what has Ed Douglas been up to over the past five years? At the end of 2001, Ed opened the Double Eagle, a hip shop located at 3506 Adams Avenue in Normal Heights. After a few years in that location, he moved down the street to a space at 3331 Adams Avenue, a few doors down from Lestat's. In addition to a huge variety of hand-tooled leather purses and goods, the Double Eagle has always carried many beautiful and rare guitars, various other stringed instruments, unique collectibles, and bits of Americana. In 2003, Ed, in collaboration with the San

Photo: Liz Abbott



Ed at a practice in his shop with members of his band High, Wide & Handsome on the eve of the Roots Festival this year.

Diego Troubadour, brought the Scottsville Squirrel Barkers together for a 40-year reunion. A concert at the Carlsbad Theatre on Friday night kicked off that weekend in April, followed by two appearances at the 30th Annual Adams Avenue Roots Festival on Saturday. Chris Hillman (Byrds, Flying Burrito Brothers), Bernie Leadon (founding member of the Eagles), Larry Murray (Hearts & Flowers), and Kenny Wertz (Flying Burrito Brothers, Country Gazette), were all there together with Ed for a glorious weekend of music and memories.



Scottsville Squirrel Barkers 40th reunion at the Adams Ave. Roots Festival in 2003

In June, Ed's lease will be up at his Adams Avenue location and he has decided to give up the shop and move his guitar repair operation to a workshop at his home in Normal Heights. He and his wife, Lynn, are also interested in starting an Internet business to sell antiques on line. Ed has spent most of his life in this neighborhood. As he sees it, small businesses are in decline across the country. He says, "Ten years ago there were 20 antique shops along Adams Avenue. Now there are five. Where there were 10 bookstores, now three remain. More and more, people are shopping on line. They'll come into my shop, ask a million questions about a particular instrument, then go back home and find the same instrument on the Internet for a lot less money."

The Double Eagle's difficulty to sustain itself coupled with recent health issues have made it necessary for Ed to make a change in plans. After he recovers from two planned knee operations, one on each knee, he'll plunge into the next chapter of his life to repair stringed instruments in his studio. His home business will even offer a pick up and delivery service within the city. Beginning on May 15, the Double Eagle will hold a retirement sale at 50 percent off everything in the store until it's all gone. The *Troubadour* wishes Ed the best of luck in his new venture. — Liz Abbott

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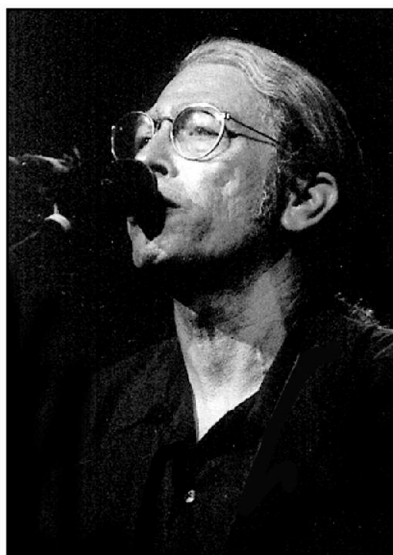
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