

## Charles Stacey releases new album

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FARMINGTON — Therapist by day and "old folkie" troubadour by night, Charles Stacey believes stories bring people together.

The Farmington singer-songwriter just released his 16th studio recording with his band Gypsyfire this month. The group plays traditional Irish songs along with Stacey's original narrative folk tales spun in the Celtic tradition.

A scholar of Celtic music, Stacey places pulls his music from periods in history and infuses it with contemporary elements in the singing and playing.

"What many take popularly as Celtic music is actually English music - Chieftains, Clancy Brothers, Riverdance with fiddle and pipes," he said. "But there is an earlier tradition of Gaelic acapella with vocal coloration that sing the old stories."

After nearly a half century of composing and performing across the country, Stacey has authored almost 200 of his own original songs and played under the name Gypsyfire for the last 17 years. In concert, he often is accompanied on vocals by his wife, Cynthia.

"We're often told, based on the unexpected rhythms our music takes, that we're too folk to be Irish and too Irish to be folk," he said.

Charles Stacey's new recording, "Time's Mandala: The Celtic Calendar Project," is a meditation on the journey of life based on the Celtic calendar's festive holidays, including the solstice and equinox and All Hallow's Eve, or Samhain.

"I grew up observing many of those Celtic holidays my family was a traditional Irish family," Stacey said.

Stacey's father moved the family from the east coast to various Midwest cities as he changed jobs, Stacey said. Through all that change, he kept the clan centered with cultural traditions and art.

"My mom played piano and sang in little theaters on Broadway and my father was originally a studio engineer in New York. She gave me her Kodak Brownie Hawkeye camera and that got me started taking pictures."

But it would be the guitar that Stacey would make his constant companion.

"My dad got me a guitar at age 6 and by age 10 I was performing one talent show or fundraiser after another," he said.

Stacey, who raised six kids with his second wife, Cynthia, brought the family along on numerous cross-country tours, combining concerts with family vacations, often camping along the way.

"There were many a performance that a couple of our younger kids would be a natural part of it, singing or dancing along to the music on stage," Stacey said. "We certainly earned our best tips when they did."

The current band name, Gypsyfire is based on a song Stacey wrote about a young man who combats intolerance and finds community among gypsies gathered together around a fire. The story complements the singer-songwriter's artistic approach, honed over decades as he played everywhere from coffee houses and state park amphitheatres to folk clubs and Irish bars.

"I have always gained strength from building an arts community," Stacey said.

"There's a really rich arts scene in the Four Corners region," Stacey said. "I have been fortunate to meet and work with so much of the local talent that often is criminally overshadowed by scenes in Taos or Santa Fe."

Gypsyfire plays several shows each month locally, including main stage performances at the Aztec Highland Games each year, gigs at local art galleries In Cahoots! and the Feat of Clay artist co-op. And there are the informal gatherings around town.

Stacey continues to search for surprising contexts, if only to connect with newer audiences.

Stacey hopes to fully realize the new album by using the visual arts. Later this year, Albuquerque performance artist Debbie Doggett will feature the album as a spoken word and movement piece.

"Playing acoustic guitar means you have to get the audience more meaningfully integrated with the music, not simply following a set list from start to finish," he said. "All my performances are like that - reading the audience and keeping the flow of ideas going."

Themes of transcending one's own culture, finding acceptance, fleeing from abuse or despair, and finding a place to call home animate much of Stacey's work. His songs celebrate the people he has met throughout his on-the-move upbringing and a varied career as a photojournalist, fine-art photographer, licensed marriage and family counselor, and teacher.

Stacey especially values the sharing of songs when fellow traveling musicians on the road get together for informal, often impromptu, musical gatherings.

One of those friends is Houston-based singer-songwriter, Ken Gaines, who, like Stacey, has spent decades performing his music all while keeping a day job he loves.

"Charlie's not just a fine songwriter, he's a scholar of many cultures, people and places," Gaines said. "A younger person just can't bring that vast experience he has lived to the song."

Stacey met Gaines in Houston while he was getting sober and pursuing a master's degree in counseling.

"I got into therapy because I needed it," Stacey said. "My graduate thesis was a collection of songs featuring the stories of the work I was doing. Music has made it possible to balance the pressures of work and family and be free through self-expression to keep from getting overwhelmed by the built-in pressures."

Stacey will hold several concerts this month to share his unique blend of expressive Celtic and traditional folk. On Friday, Feb. 15, he will play an extended set of music at In Cahoots Gallery for the first Farmington Gallery Walk of the year. February 23, 24 and 25 he will be playing at the High Desert Art Show at San Juan College Henderson Fine Arts Center. Both events are free. Gypsyfire's new CD, "Time's Mandala," can be purchased online at [gypsyfire.com](http://gypsyfire.com) or [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com).