



BIO

“Running the whitewater on a raft, the fall of rain on a parched landscape, a child playing at being a bee ... Don Charles and Deb Gessner craft some memorable images by drawing on their Southwestern experiences.” (Dirty Linen)

Arizona harp and guitar duo, D-Squared, weaves a tonal fabric of poignant lyrics, earth-rooted melodies and stark, hypnotic rhythms. Combining guitar, mandola, banjo and a low, resonant voice with folk harp, concertina, accordion and beguiling vocals, Charles and Gessner lead listeners through a landscape that is both arid and lush, pristine and desecrated, innocent and arrogant.

Attending a show is like joining a gathering of friends around the kitchen table. Natural storytellers with a sly wit, D-Squared enchant audiences with tales of their beloved Southwest and the rocks, stars, plants and critters that share it.

Deb Gessner’s *“faux reverent aura framed by her folk harp will trick you if you don’t pay close attention - her wondrous playing emits a gleam of humor and hope”* (Acoustic Scene), and Don Charles has been called *“one of the best folk songwriters in a long time.”* (Victory Review)

“Unusual, unclassifiable tunes keep the music haunting - familiar and avant-garde at the same time.” (Folk Harp Journal) *“They play and sing like Richard and Linda Thompson used to.”* (Phoenix New Times)

Honed on a remote cattle ranch where they met, married and developed their music, D-Squared’s spacious sound reflects a life lived outdoors under high western skies. Their music is like a drink of cool water after a long walk through the desert.

They released their first CD - *matter of life & death* - in 1993 as Don Charles & Deb Gessner, and became known as D-Squared in 1997 upon release of their second CD – *Big Sky Full O’Dumb Stars*. A third album – *Accidentally Live* – came out in 2006.

Charles’ song “Row” was included on *Songs and Stories from Grand Canyon*, produced by Smithsonian Folkways, while many other D-Squared compositions have been featured in films, PBS documentaries, theater, compilation CDs, and other audio projects. Their song and video, “*Little Iraq*”, produced by filmmaker Cheryl Colan, recently found a spot on Neil Young’s *Living With War Today* website (www.neilyoung.com/lwwtoday).

Charles acknowledges debts to many songwriters and bands that have influenced him, among them Leonard Cohen, Van Morrison, Pentangle, Trapezoid, Metamora and Public Domain. Gessner’s influences include Eric Satie, French dance music, Irish airs and traditional Jewish melodies.

D-Squared regularly tours the country playing concerts, coffee houses, festivals and private venues. Over the years they have shared the stage with Greg Brown, Robin and Linda Williams, Bryan Bowers, Bill Morrissey, Peter Yarrow, John Denver, Chuck Pyle and Don Edwards. They have performed for thousands of K-12 students through school assembly and artist residency programs as well as conducted classes on songwriting, arranging and performance.



QUOTES

Don Charles is “an insightful writer who can write with equal conviction about the forces of nature, relationships, and the Publisher’s Clearinghouse Sweepstakes.”

Serene Dominic
Phoenix New Times

Deb Gessner’s “faux reverent aura framed by her folk harp will trick you if you don’t pay close attention. Her wondrous playing emits a gleam of humor and hope.”

Mariah Fleming
Acoustic Scene

“... poetic and elegant ...”

Molly Who
Tucson Weekly

“Hauntingly beautiful music.”

Warren Miller
Sharlot Hall Museum

“... songs which eloquently and beautifully recognizes the ‘flux and tension’ at the heart of us all.”

Scott Foley
Corvallis Folklore Society

“Unique sonic textures ...”

Woody Thompson
Santa Fe New Mexican

“... the ultimate convergence of artists, songs and technology ... balancing the fragility of their sound with the power of their lyric ...”

Ron Simpson
Mix Magazine

“Not only does Charles have an ear for a memorable melody and an intriguing rhyme, he also has a different perspective from that of many cited writers ...”

Andrew Means
Scottsdale Progress

“...a heartwarming and spine-tingling performance.”

Ron Nieman
Arizona Folk News

“Superb artistry...”

Bobby Hart
Songwriter

“Not plain folk... Charles and Gessner are multi-instrumentalists, humorists and interpreters who keep an audience on edge.”

Dean Rhodes
Phoenix Gazette

“They listen to birds sing and coyotes howl and hear the tempo, the rhythm in it all.”

Claudette Simpson
Prescott Sun

“A great sound and great songs. They just make me feel good...”

Keith Curtis
Songwriter

“Thank you, thank you, thank you for the chocolates hidden within. I will savour them even more as I share them with my listeners over the coming weeks, months and years”

Phil Young, *Folk On The Fringe*
3MDR, Melbourne, Australia”

“It’s earthy and ‘otherworldly’ at the same time. It’s magic!”

P.J. Curtis
Producer



REVIEW

Jo Morrison

Folk Harp Journal

Issue no. 105, Fall 1999

I am always on the lookout for people who are doing something different and innovative on the harp, and I think D-Squared has discovered a whole new breadth of expression for the instrument. Deb Gessner's harp interweaves gracefully with Don Charles' guitar and vocals to create a new sound on the face of the singer-songwriter scene. The result is a stark and hypnotic landscape of sound, deftly drawing the picture of the great Southwest, their home. In their music, this duo from Arizona has chosen to tackle tough issues and the meaning of it all. The result is well worth checking out.

Their first release, **matter of life & death**, has an earthy feel, as if freshly dug from the parched soil. The CD opens with a highly-percussive, almost a capella song titled *Rain* which paints a picture of a rainstorm through the sounds of the congas, the harp and the vocals themselves. From this start, we proceed through a series of songs about such diverse subjects as the lottery, use of public lands (the great outdoors), baking bread and relationships. There's a nice song about how we are tied to the earth, *The Wind in the Willow*, which features a delightful trade-off of lines between the guitar and the harp. Besides all these original songs, there is also a traditional Appalachian track, *Tater Patch/Little Red Rockin' Chair*, which gives the impression of a gentle lullaby by the way the tunes are slowed down and backed by the harp in this arrangement.

My favorite things on this recording are the instrumentals. Almost tone poems, they delicately paint a picture of the subject matter through music. *When the Monsoons Finally Came* gives the textures and sounds of rain arriving in the parched Southwest. In *Whirlybird* we get the image of maple seeds spinning down from the trees, over and over again. My very favorite is titled *Aaron Dreams of Bees*, a musical story of a small boy busy gathering pollen with the bees. This waltz has just the right timbre, with the harp taking the lead with a slightly Slavic sound, backed by concertina, mandola and clarinet. It's a merry-go-round of the joy of investigation.

Big Sky Full o' Dumb Stars continues where the first recording left off. Featuring original songs that explore the sometimes bizarre, sometimes intense environment of what we call life, D-Squared manages to capture the humor as well as the joy and the pain. Their love of music shines through on this recording.

There is a wider diversity of sounds on this second recording, although the harp still features prominently on many of the tunes. When it is not a featured instrument, it is deftly used to provide variety to the music. Small harp riffs keep the music interesting, without overpowering the subtleties created by the varying sounds. Along with the harp, guitar and well-blended vocals are occasional uses of tenor banjo, mandolin, psaltery, accordion, concertina, harmonica and percussion.

D-Squared advertises itself as being "Chamberfolk with a twist." This description seems adequate, but incomplete. There is a certain chamber quality to the instrumentation — a delicate balance of strings and things carefully blended to create the atmosphere of the music. The vocals add a completely different dimension, however, bringing in a bit of an Simon and Garfunkel feel. Unusual, unclassifiable tunes such as *Sparrows Falling*, a prayer of a mother as her only son departs from home, keep the music haunting — familiar and avant-garde all at the same time. It is this untenable mystique that makes this music worth investigating.



PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Wed Aug 8, **Strings**, Emeryville, CA www.strings.org

Fri Aug 17, **Steynberg Gallery**, San Luis Obispo, CA

Sat Aug 18, **Living Traditions Concerts**, Anaheim, CA

Sun Aug 19, **Costa Mesa Unitarian Universalist Church**, Costa Mesa, CA

Sat Sept 22, **Big Bug Station**, Mayer, AZ with *Michael McGarrah*

Thu Sep 27, **Daniel Boone Regional Library**, Columbia, MO www.dbrl.org/branch/columbia

Fri Sep 28, **FARM Conference Showcase**, Folk Alliance Regional Midwest, Techny Towers
Retreat Center, Northfield, IL www.farmfolk.org

Thu Oct 4, **Cafe Paradiso**, Fairfield, IA www.cafeparadiso.net

Sat Oct 6, **Coffee Grounds**, Terre Haute, IN www.thecoffeegrounds.biz

Thu Oct 11, **Bucyrus Little Theater**, Bucyrus, OH with Bob Bellamy & Wendy Barlow, Hatchback

Fri Oct 12, **Danville Elementary School**, Danville, OH

Sat Oct 13, **Sprouted Acorn House Concert**, Charm, OH sproutedacorn.blogspot.com/

Sun. Oct 14, **Quirk Center**, Akron, OH with Pat White www.ohunsicker@neo.rr.com

Sat Oct 20, **The Donkey Cafe**, Athens, OH. with Jerry Rockwell. www.jcrmusic.com

Fri Oct 27, **The Brown Grand Theater**, Concordia, KS. www.browngrand.org with Kansas'
own Ann Zimmerman. www.annzimmerman.com

Thu Nov 1, **The Back Room**, Great Bend, KS bartonarts.org/calendar/index.html

Sat Nov 3, **High Plains Radio Living Room Concert**, Garden City, KS www.hppr.org

Fri Nov 9, **Aberdeen Steak House**, Atwood, KS westks.com/aberdeen/

Sat Nov 10, **Avogadro's Number**, Ft. Collins, CO www.avogadros.com

Sat Nov 17, **Date Creek Ranch**, Wickenburg, AZ

Sat Dec 1, **Big Bug Station**, Mayer, AZ

Fri Dec 14, **Folk Sessions**, Granite Peak UU Church, Prescott, AZ www.folksessions.com