



Photo Courtesy Wild and Blue

## From the apple orchards of Corralitos to the streets of the Big Apple

**Wild and Blue— A Unique father/daughter duo that began when the daughter was age three**

By Teresa Hidalgo Dance

**W**hat do you call the three-year-old singer in a band of grown men? What do you call the person who would rather be late for work than let a song forming in his mind slip through his fingers?

You call the singing toddler April and the songwriter Steve Bennett, the father/daughter duo of the Americana band, Wild and Blue. April is now 32 years old. She and Steve, 68, just completed a tour of Northern California to promote their debut album "Restless", which was released in January of this year. It has placed in the top ten on the Roots Music Report chart for indie and small artist acts.

April got her precocious start when her dad sang with the house band of Roaring Camp Railroads, a tourist attraction in Felton. He called her over from the audience and they all discovered that she could sing. Eventually, when expecting to be called to perform, April sat backstage with a book in hand that she would return to after each performance. "It was very good for my summer reading," she chuckled.

Steve paid his daughter from the higher compensation Roaring Camp gave him when

she started singing with the house band. "He always made sure, even when I was a little kid, that I got paid. That was very important," April said. And what would a child spend her wages on? "I saved money for many years with the idea that I was going to buy a car," she said. "I didn't buy a car. I actually ended up paying my own tuition to a performing arts intensive when I was 17."

Family is foundational to Wild and Blue's success. Steve's roots in music are tied to his family. His father was John Bennett, a jazz saxophone player, and his mother, Jean, was a folk singer and guitar teacher. His older brother, known around Santa Cruz as David Beaudry, is a singer/songwriter. Steve got his start in songwriting by composing alongside his brother when they were teenagers. April's mother, Candice Ward, was the engine that propelled Steve to reach out to music venues to showcase his talent. Candice is not a professional musician but has studied violin. She and Steve always have encouraged April, their only child, who now also has the support of her husband Bobby, a talented vocalist and guitarist.

For many years before he had regular gigs, Steve was a street performer, "I performed in street corners in Los Angeles, then here in Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Seattle, everywhere. I used to hitch around with my music," he said. "The world was my stage."

The world is now Wild and Blue's stage with their "Restless" album, which contains many of Steve's original songs. His songwriting comes as naturally as does singing with his daughter.

"A lot of my songs are kind of written internally and then they come out very quickly, fully formed, and require very little editing," said Steve of his process. "I'm kind of an incurable romantic and the great majority of my songs have to do with love, missing someone, going through the pain of breaking up with someone. It's just what touches me." Of course, heartache isn't his only inspiration. "Sometimes, people say things to me that spark a song," he said. "Like Tom T. Hall, a

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(Above) Father and daughter duo Steve and April Bennett of Wild and Blue express enthusiasm for their music.



(Above) April Bennett on stage during a performance at Moe's Alley in Santa Cruz.

when I get to work and finish it." April has been the source of inspiration for many of Steve's songs. Their latest hit single is, "Wedding Dress for Sale," inspired by April's broken engagement that led her to sell her wedding gown. Songs like that, with plenty of sentiment, are April's forte. And her passion is "being where the action is." This drive has led her to branch out to other areas of the performing arts such as acting, directing, and special effects make-up. Her current base for all that unstoppable creative energy is New York.

Tom Savini's Special Make-up Effects Program at Douglas Education Center in Monessen, Pennsylvania. She learned to make prosthetics, took classes in animatronics, and did fashion. But she caught the acting bug long

Photo Benjamin Canant



(Above) April Bennett as Sir Isaac Newton in the 1915 production of *Isaac's Eye* with the Sidereal Theatre Company.

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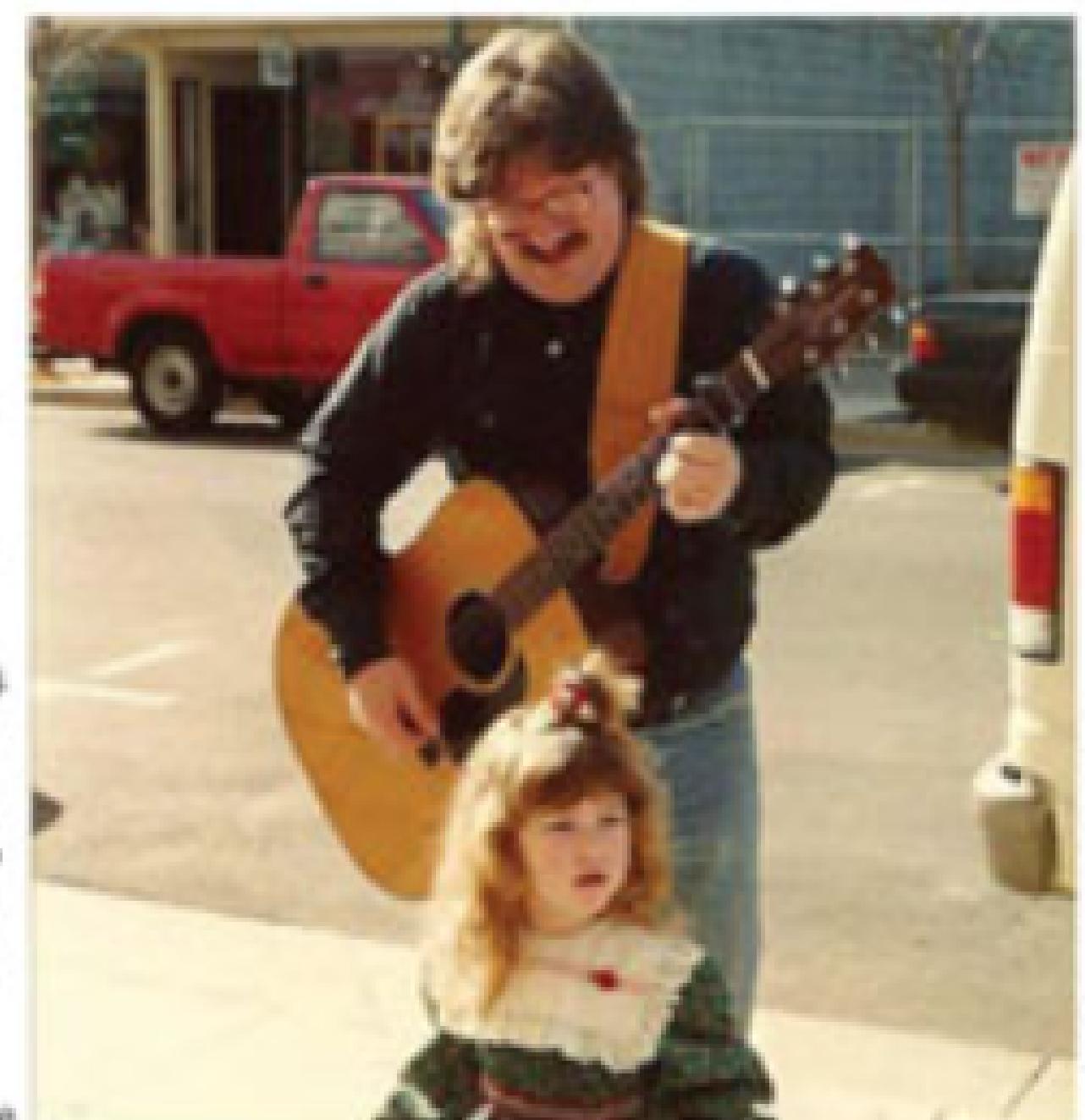
(Above) April Bennett studied the art of theatrical make up at Tom Savini's Special Make-up Effects Program at Douglas Education Center in Monessen, Pennsylvania.

famous country music songwriter who was known for writing things down on a matchbook in a bar when he heard somebody say something that he thought was interesting." The process takes many forms, and isn't always predictable.

"Sometimes I'll write a chorus and it'll just kind of sit there for a long time before I finish it," he said. "Other times, anywhere between thirty minutes to an hour of song will just come out, fully formed. Usually, it happens when I'm alone. It's actually happened fairly frequently in the last ten years or so when I'll be stuck in traffic on the freeway and a song will just start coming down and I'll have to dictate it or stay in the parking lot

City. "It's just my favorite place in the world as an artist," she said. "It's endlessly stimulating in terms of opportunity and also, just the sheer amount of creative energy that's here. It's not my hometown, but New York City definitely feels like one. Just the fact that we get to drive into that skyline every single time that we leave and come back is incredible. Just to be here is incredible."

April's first professional foray in New York was as a freelance make-up-artist for short films and television pilots. She had studied at



(Above) Steve and April Bennett performing on the sidewalks of Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz.

Photo Country Gold and Blue

before that. Her first audition was at 8 years of age, when she acted in school plays in Santa Cruz. Her first experience as a professional actress was in *A Christmas Carol* with Easy Street Theatre. This was followed by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other plays at Cabrillo College put on by Sarah Albertson and her husband Bill Peters. April's first directing experience was *Romeo and Juliet* in her final year of high school. Other directing experiences came through Santa Cruz Actors Theatre during its "8 Tens at 8" festival. Not content to merely seek acting and directing gigs, April created opportunities for herself and others by co-founding Sidereal Theatre Company with her friend, Davis Banta.

As New York City slowly reopens, April also writes material for Your Friends, an improv and sketch comedy troupe which performs online and in person across the San Francisco Bay Area. Her most recent work is the special effects make-up in the short film *Jefferson Avenue*, directed by Hannah Whisenant. Not too long ago, April looked into cooking professionally, remembering with fondness the many times she baked with her mom. "Feeding people is something I really enjoy," she observed.

Steve's world, on the other hand, is almost always wrapped in music. An interest in general history, for instance, has segued into a passion for music history. "The music that we play now," he said, "is a combination of traditional country and folk and also, vintage soul and blues. I've always wanted to have a really good knowledge on where it was coming from and it gives me a better feel for my song when I'm singing it and writing it, just to be fully informed about it."

Steve and April hold high hopes of focusing entirely on playing music together in the near future. Steve, who has been a dedicated auto parts professional for Kelley's Service Inc. for the past 23 years, said that he would welcome being self-sufficient on music alone.

The red-tailed hawk that appears on their album cover and on the merchandise that the Bennetts launched online, symbolizes this restlessness when creating their music. "'Restless' was a culmination of decades of songs and working together and family," April said. Like the constant motion of the red-tailed hawk, the Wild and Blue Band is ready for the next round of shows and tours as it moves towards reaching the world through their music. ■

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