

# Thaddeus Spae

## Songwriter & Entertainer



A forty-year veteran of the folk wars, award-winning singer/songwriter Thaddeus Spae is an innovative, eclectic entertainer who mixes unreliable narratives with songs ranging from humorous and deftly satiric to inspirational, literate and allusive. He accompanies himself with precise exuberance on an improbable assortment of instruments, including 12 string guitar, harmonica, trombone, banjolin, ukulele, guitarron and percussion — sometimes several at once.

Thaddeus Spae's compositions have been featured on National Public Radio, Showtime cable television and Broadway, choreographed by the Paul Taylor Dance Troupe and recorded for broadcast by the BBC. He has performed at venues from Tipitina's in

New Orleans to the EMP in Seattle and at numerous fairs and festivals including Bumbershoot, the Oregon Country Fair and the Sawdust Festival. Thaddeus was a founding participant in the nationally known Seattle City Parks Buskers program, a multi-finalist and prizewinner at the Tumbleweed Folk Festival songwriting competition, and is listed in the King County Touring Arts Roster. He has appeared with Baby Gramps, R. Chumleigh, Artis the Spoonman, the Flying Karamazov Brothers and others, and for thirty years he toured and recorded as half of the folk duo Amber Tide. His latest CD *You And What Army?* was released in 2015.

*Unique talent — gutsy singing, witty and soulful arrangements.*

—Serni Solidarios, University of Puget Sound

*Something different.*

—ABC Weekend News

*“Incredibly diverse and multi-talented...gall and guts...Spae has a special quirky look at humanity, sharp, on-target, and spikes your inner brain channels. His voice holds true and rings out.”*

—Chris Lunn, *Ancient Victorys*

*Eclectic jazz-tinged sounds and painfully bad jokes.*

—seattle.alltechn.com

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Steve Shay

# **Thaddeus Spae**

## **Songwriter & Entertainer**

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Michelle Bates

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High energy, high comedy and highly spiritual all at the same time.

—T J Hatfield, Victory Review

The Cole Porter of vaudeville folk.

—Tim McKamey, Ancient Victorys

Thaddeus's virtuoso instrumentals make this band sound respectable for a change. This is a warped songwriter and certified crazyman who will do ANYTHING to get an audience off its duff and with the program.

—Stanislove, Emerald City Jug Band

Damn, that's a lot of instruments. That's beyond eclectic. That's scary.

— The Stranger

Your performance left everyone gasping for breath and wishing for more. Thaddeus on the guitar sounds like several players at once. It was a very magical moment in our festival.

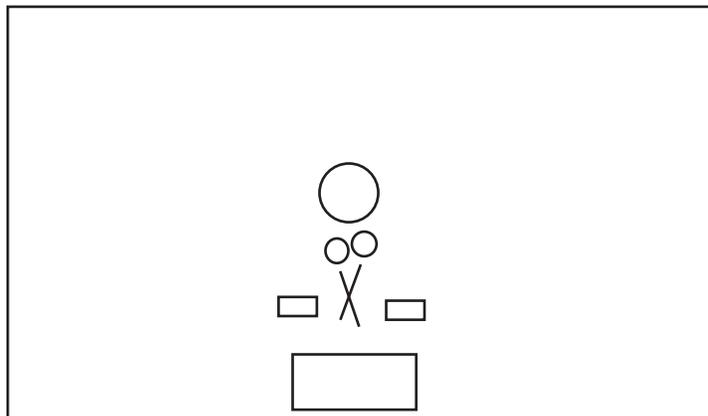
— Ken Tucker, Tucson Folk Festival

# Thaddeus Spae Stage Setup

**THADDEUS SPAE** (Shpay): Vocals, guitar, harmonica, guitarron,  
trombone, banjo-uke, hi-hat

**Equipment List:**

- 1 - armless chair
- 2- mics w/ boom stands
- 2- direct ins
- 1- monitor



- Minimum amplification and monitoring is required in small rooms.

Setup time: 10 minutes

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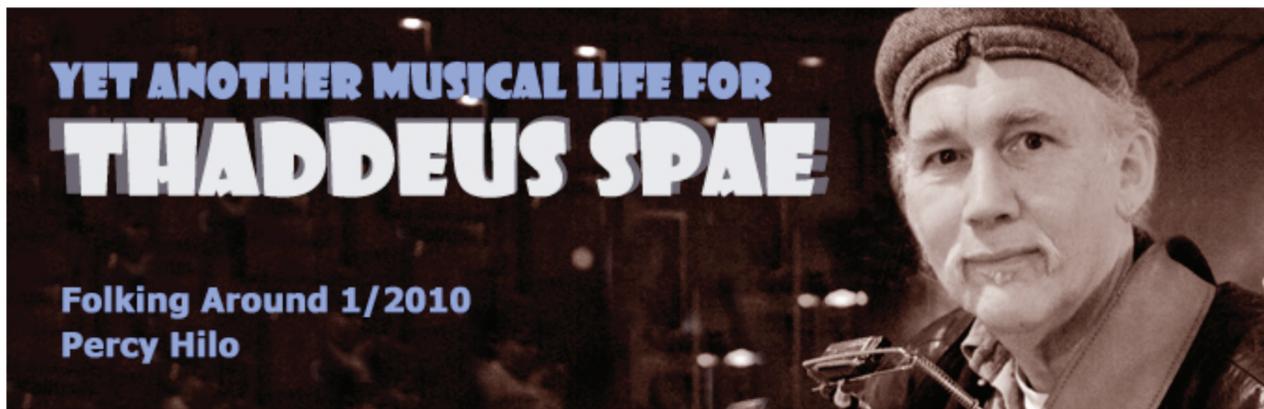
Thaddeus Spae gigs solo outside.

# West Seattle Herald

White Center News



West Seattle's Thaddeus Spae performed trombone with the klezmer band Klez Katz at the 38th Annual Northwest Folklife Festival at Seattle Center May 25. The band performed its traditional Yiddish music in the Charlotte Martin Theatre. Spae also performed a solo set outdoors with trombone, guitar, harmonica and voice.



### Introducing...

Thaddeus Spae takes the stage in a light colored, plain but smart outfit and hat that present a bit of vaudeville. He often wears a highly expressive tie and immediately we know we are in for something unexpected. His instrument display of trombone, guitar, guitarron, ukulele, banjo uke, high hat, harmonica and more makes us wonder how many are in his orchestra. But there's no orchestra. He leads off with a few quips and ruminations concerning life in general and the human condition while plucking on one of his instruments and before the first song we're laughing, squarely in his corner. He proceeds to deliver a set of songs that can best be described as eclectic: Vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, jazz, pop, novelty, his original songs and anything else that moves or entertains. The arrangements are all his own. Any of his instruments (or more than one at a time) combined with his vocals are more than enough to turn a sparse arrangement into full sound. His vocals always contribute a distinctive flavor in that each lyric is sung to match the theme and music, which more easily involves us, making our sing-a-long and laughter a natural extension of the piece. The in-between patter continues to set the tone as he exhibits a vast knowledge of not only music but the workings of daily life. He delivers all in a snappy manner with unique vocabulary that lets us know this is no idiot who happens to be a musician, but an intelligent man with a lot to say, and who prefers to say it in the most entertaining way possible. By the end of the set we know we've been in the presence of a true professional and have a new experience to put into our memory banks.

### Natural Progressions

At this point I hope those who are unfamiliar with Thaddeus will be interested enough to catch a performance and then support his music with a CD purchase. The more curious among us may want to know how he began walking his musical and cultural path and how he arrived so accomplished at this place and time (aside from the usual hard work, of course). It was his good luck to grow up in a family where homemade music was a part of life and the arts in general were valued. He began on trombone at ten, was soon into guitar, and they've both remained central to his music. He studied various facets of music and composition in high school and college and played in school bands, then in his twenties began playing for pay in coffeehouses and clubs. The 1970's provided the natural progression into street performing (feeding the stomach and landlord one tip at a time) and he quickly found kindred spirits in the Flying Karamazov Brothers, Artis the Spoonman, Reverend Chumleigh and others with whom he shared the stage. This was a fulfilling, educational and mostly enjoyable period for Thaddeus, but it was in 1977 while busking solo that he encountered a new spirit in a way that would change two lives forever.

This being was Sandahbeth (who became Spae), a beautiful, generous and highly talented woman who made friends easily, on and off stage. She played flute, harmonica and percussion well and was possessed of a marvellous and full-powered vocal instrument that could alternately soar like a bird or be bold, husky and straightforward. She was well versed in the blues, gospel and jazz of her African-American heritage. Her repertoire and talents, as well as her cultural reach and belief in experimentation, were a perfect compliment to Thaddeus. This resulted in the formation of the artistic duo Amber Tide. They spent many years living on the road playing clubs, concerts, festivals, churches and wherever there was an audience to please, and recorded a number of tapes and CD's. In the 90's they settled in Seattle so that they could better cope with Sandahbeth's deteriorating health. They continued to play as much as possible as a couple as well as in other bands such as the Tribal Voices Jam Band. In order to attain a more regular income they established Bard's Cathedra, an audio recording and short-run CD design and manufacturing business, which is still going strong. As time went by Sandahbeth's health became even more frail which placed Thaddeus in the position of being an all-purpose helper and transportation coordinator. This was a difficult task that he accepted and discharged willingly. This heroic work came to an end on June 15th, 2008 when Sandahbeth's death put an end to a loving and creative three decade relationship.



## Reinventions

So how does one reinvent themselves at 57? What sort of new adventures await? I got a clue at last Folklife Festival when I MC'd his performance on the Alki Court Stage and found him retooled as a solo acoustic songwriter/entertainer/multi-instrumentalist. (It was as if he'd returned to his solo roots but he hadn't been back there in so long it seemed like retooling). As always, he was personable, witty and his rap made it easy to connect to him. His performance was much better when he delivered his esoteric songs on several instruments. It was a lot of fun and at the end the audience left feeling better than when they arrived, which is the measure of a fine performance. I noticed at that time and in later performances that he played a higher percentage of originals than before. Thaddeus admits that he's been doing a lot of writing of late, divided between serious and novelty songs. This seems to fit in with his current goals of figuring out his own story and making sense of his life. Apparently, for Thaddeus, writing it and then singing it out is an enjoyable and meaningful way to put it in order. Personally, I feel that Thaddeus already has written a fine story w/his life but I won't argue w/good singable and humorous songs, and in fact, I'm going to tell you about some of them.

Among recent compositions, "The Art Of The Possible" is an uplifting take on getting by day to day by doing what we can with what we've got. It's bouncy and danceable but restrained with a bluesy harmonica. "Bertha's Boogie" is a lively piece that features trombone and makes your feet move. "Clever Human Disguise" is a mysterious confession with a warning concerning what's inside us, delivered in a gravelly voice and played on the guitarron a Mexican bass, which works well with the lyrics. "Good Man" champions the ordinary person in each of us, while "Turtles All The Way Down" is a song of evolution that lovingly disdains various philosophies in favor of nature's way and will have you smiling and singing along. These and more are on Thaddeus' first solo CD, "Campfire Jazz" (more on that later--[See review in CD review section](#)). Among older keepers are the positive and informative "Sum Of Our Parts", in which he exhibits the knowledge of a doctor and the philosophy of a sage, "Other Side Of The Night" tells us there's always hope if we'll just keep on keeping on, and "I Will Be With You", a song of love and loyalty that is forever true because he lived it. These songs involve us and have a lot to say but in a friendly and non-preachy manner so that we can easily digest the content while listening, dancing or singing along. Equally meaningful is that there's simply nobody around who shares Thaddeus' concepts of theme, language and presentation so when we hear him we're always getting an original in more ways than one.



### The Sounds

While I find it easy to describe the songs, it's a genuine challenge to articulate the sounds. As previously mentioned, Thaddeus doesn't just deliver a straight-on lyric backed by a conventional melody and rhythm. Instead he places specific vocal and instrumental notes that are out of the ordinary for mainstream music but are suited for what he's creating and performing. This enables him to produce his own ultimate musical truth in a manner that is humorous, spiritual and highly entertaining, and marks yet another way in which he's a unique presenter.

### More to life

2010 is bound to offer Thaddeus some new adventures as he walks his herky-jerky path. The first one will have happened before you read this. He has met a new soul mate and on January 1st he and Ada-Reva Franklin will tie the knot. Let us all wish them many healthy, happy and musical years together. Thaddeus also continues to pursue gigs (and is looking to tour regionally if you happen to book clubs, festivals and such), records high quality CD's for personal satisfaction and professional acceptance, plays in bands like Snake Suspenders and the Klez Katz. He looks forward to making each and every one of you happy with his music.

For Thaddeus, it's all about keeping one's life together as a working musician and in this regard he points to his friendships with David and Roselyn from New Orleans and our own Steve and Kristy Nebel as role models who've proved it can be done.

### Take it all in

So how do you get in on all of this? Well, it's easy. Thaddeus' musical information including schedules, ruminations and anything else he wishes to share can be found on his website: [www.tspae.com](http://www.tspae.com) and there's a link to Bard's Cathedral for CD sales. You can also email him at: [tspae@tspae.com](mailto:tspae@tspae.com) with questions, which will receive a straightforward or convoluted response depending on the question or his mood at the time. But two things are certain: Thaddeus likes to make good music and have people tell him that he's fun and you like to listen to good music and have fun. So catch a set of his sometime and you'll both get what you want.

# Ancient Victorys

*The past forty years are celebrated today... we go into the future presenting and documenting Northwest acoustic musicians*

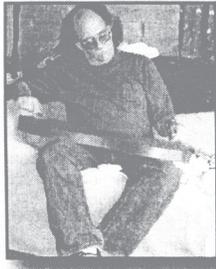
A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 4 - Winter 2009/2010

**Reviews**

15 CD, book and concert reviews of Ancient Victory Musicians

**Page 13**



**Dan Roberts**

*Looks and Sounds Like a Folksinger (Celtic, Folk, Maritime, Renaissance, Pop/Rock, Classical, Blues*  
**Page 3**

**Steve & Kristi Nebel**

*Folking from Alaska to the United Kingdom*

**Page 5**



**Ancient Victorys Open Mike, Thurs. March 11 Thurs. June 10**

**7:00 p.m. Antique Sandwich**

**Page 13**

## Thaddeus Spae

Cole Porter of Vaudeville Folk

I sat down with Thaddeus Spae one afternoon recently at Victory Music's Q Café in Ballard and videotaped a conversation that was as multi-faceted as his musical performances. I kept expecting him to pull a trombone out of his back pocket to illustrate the physics of acoustics in brass instruments, or a set of punch cards he used to program a bedroom-sized 32kb IBM 1130 computer at Reed College in Portland in 1969. Having studied electronic music later at Evergreen College in pursuit of a degree in "Wandering Minstrelsy", his interests range wide, he has delved into many subjects and emerged the wiser for it. Picking Thaddeus' brain is like browsing through a curiosity shop of musical, technological and philosophical wonders. You never know what you might discover in there, but it's always fascinating. His passion for gizmos and gadgets is contagious and his descriptions of all things folk are always colorful and engaging. He is an intense and passionate synthesist of the musical arts, plays a variety of musical styles and instruments, both solo and in several bands. In short, the kind of musical artist that refuses to be easily categorized and therefore a real challenge to market in a society such as ours where value = marketing ease. But to the cultural microcosm of Ancient Victorys, Victory Music, and the overall folk scene of the Northwest, he is a rare treasure and a delight to behold.

You can read a great article about Thaddeus' musical influences and career by Percy Hilo in the online January, 2010 issue of the Victory Review (see "Folking Around" in the archives at [www.victorymusic.org](http://www.victorymusic.org)). But in the conversation, I had with Thaddeus last week, I was primarily interested in getting to know more about this strange and wonderful presence I had witnessed at the quarterly Ancient Victorys open mikes over the past year. I barely had time to scratch the surface, but I discovered a joyfully creative human being full of paradoxes.

Doing the videotaping and producing DVDs for Ancient Victorys recently, I found Thaddeus to be an unusually lively and expressive character on stage.



He occupies a different 'personal space' from the quiet introspective stereotypical folksinger/singer/songwriter. Spae learned the art of vaudevillian performing at festivals and on street corners many years ago working with Reverend Chumbleigh, the Flying Karamazov Brothers and Artis the Spoonman. In that environment it is essential to utilize every nuance, musical hook and every trick in the book to command the space around *(continued on page 8)*



## Thaddeus Spae *(continued from page 3)*

you. If you don't draw a crowd, you're just taking up space (and taking home no dough). So you learn to project and keep people's interest with humor and lively energy. When the crowd gets infected, it feeds back to the performer and energizes the performance all the more, so the crowd gets a better show, and the performer makes more dough. So everybody wins.

Later Thaddeus met and travelled extensively with the first love of his life, Sandabeth, a dynamic vocalist and soulful woman who could also generate that kind of live energy that infects audiences in that positive, life-affirming way. They played festivals in Arizona and travelled the Southwest and West Coast trying out various kinds of musical styles, eventually finding a winning combination of folk, and blues with a strong connection to the spiritual underpinnings of gospel and jazz. They found this so much more rewarding than the electronic lounge music they had been trying to make it with previously in clubs. Once again, it was more of an outdoors, festive kind of music meant to be played in the sunshine rather than in smoky clubs and bars.

Then Sandabeth's health started to suffer from a particularly aggressive form of arthritis. They performed still as long as they could, but eventually the disease took hold and Sandabeth became critically ill. Thaddeus became her primary care-giver during the last months of her life. Having gone through that myself, I have seen firsthand how much that kind of intensive care can take out of a person. But in a mysterious way it restores something in us at the same time as it is robbing us of so much. I guess it's our humanity. In the face of so much loss, hope becomes the daily mantra and over time that establishes a kind of humility and understanding in us. In the grieving process that follows the loss of a loved one, for a long time hope is all we have. I watched Thaddeus perform St. James Infirmary Blues at Ancient Victorys not long after Sandabeth passed over. He sang and played his trombone in a soulful rendition that was at once mournful and celebratory, as only the blues can be. Like the New Orleans jazz procession described in the song, it had that strange brew of loss and life-affirming hope that is not so much named as it is 'played'. And so here was another paradox to this complex musical human being. Any sarcasm that might have existed in his humor previously had become tempered having passed through the fire of grief.

But just as a sword is tempered by fire, Thaddeus has not lost his edge. On the contrary, he's become sharper than ever. Witness the clever liturgy he delivers in his song "Turtles All the Way Down" from his latest CD, *Campfire Jazz*. This took 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Tumbleweed Festival songwriting contest, but it's a first-rate song full of humor and insight into the bewildering world of religious philosophy. Tackling such a thorny subject and doing it with humor and grace is the mark of real genius.

Visit Bard's Cathedral, Thaddeus' website for several of the musical services he offers ([www.bardscathedral.com](http://www.bardscathedral.com)) and you'll read this on the Online Store page:

"Thaddeus Spae rejoices in the talents of ten men with the time and energy of only one. Or two. Or at the most three. A composer, songwriter, essayist, graphic designer, entrepreneur and aging wildman, ..... He flogs his musical services online at [tspae.com](http://tspae.com) and commits atrocities against logic, reason and philosophical orthodoxy with the Thaddeus Gazette, [thaddeusgazette.com](http://thaddeusgazette.com)"

His wit and 'atrocities against logic, reason and philosophical orthodoxy' are self-evident in his live performances as they are in his writing. Taking his vaudevillian street energy indoors onto the folk stage is like taking your pet Irish Setter into an art museum, watching it run amongst the visitors, jumping up on laps and licking the paintings, tail wagging and ready to play with anyone who comes along. He seems to cultivate a playfulness and joy in all his endeavors which is probably why he is so effective at his work. At Bard's Cathedral, as in his monthly articles in the online Victory Review, you'll see his work ranges from assistance in graphics design and desktop publishing for recording artists, to post-production work and recording.

You'll find his CDs available there along with those of many he's helped to produce such as Klez Katz, Reverend Chumleigh, Amber Tide, Sandabeth, Erick Friedrick, the Emerald City Jug Band, Jonny Hahn, Tribal Voices, Steve and Kristi Nebel, Snake Suspenderz and a host of others.

On more than one occasion I have gone to Thaddeus for technical advice and received prompt and actually understandable assistance, which is a gift in itself given the range of skill sets one has to master these days with recording hardware and software, not to mention video and all its idiosyncracies. His articles in the online Victory Review on CyberGraphics and the Revenge of the Software and DIY Desktop Publishing are full of useful and practical information for anyone trying to navigate the digital world of recording, cover art and CD duplication. While the technology has brought into our garages and living rooms capabilities that used to only be accessible in expensive studios, understanding all the little tricks to making it work for your particular application is no small feat. But visit Thaddeus's Bard's Cathedral website and you'll find a wealth of services available for very reasonable rates. Check out his newest CD *Campfire Jazz* for a great example of how to put together a short run package that is as attractive as it is cheap.

Looking at where the recording industry has been since the Beatles and where it's going with Google and YouTube, Thaddeus sees the future of folk music not only surviving in a digital world, but actually thriving. But it will always need to be fed and driven by a live, local scene. Which is why he appreciates the new directions Victory Music has taken with so many talented volunteer staff and writers, and the great community Ancient Victorys is fostering with its quarterly events at the Antique Sandwich Company for us 'uber-geezers' who intend to keep right on going regardless of (or in spite of) things like American Idol and a pop culture which simply consists of one bubble popping after another. Thaddeus believes in the "functional" aspect of folk music, that is, how "all music becomes folk music once it hits the ears of a human being." Folk purists will argue that you can't have "new" folk music – anything after Harry Smith's Smithsonian Folkways collection or not collected by Alan Lomax simply isn't folk music. But live folk music and streaming folk music programs on the internet like Folk Alley, and KBCS's nationally syndicated weekly polls of the most played folk albums are proving that simply is not the case.

At last week's open mike at the Q Café, Thaddeus presented a new song he'd written for the new love of his life Ada-Reva Franklin. They were just wed in January and she wanted a romantic love song. So he penned what is sure to become another Spae-classic; "I'll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours". Despite the double-entendre, it really ends up with a timeless valentine from the heart with "I'll give you mine, if you give me yours". And, the song contains a marvelous jazzy harmonica instrumental break that is very "Toots"-ish (after jazz-harmonicist Toots Thielman). Which reminded me to ask him on the way out that night about the wonderful five-minute dissertation I heard him deliver one night on the three different modes used on a standard harmonica depending on whether you want to play folk, blues, or jazz. Thaddeus lives in all three modes. He truly is the "Cole Porter of Vaudeville Folk". (*Tim McKamey*)

# Ancient Victorys

*The past forty years are celebrated today... we go into the future presenting and documenting Northwest acoustic musicians*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 3 - Autumn 2009

## 8/17/09 THADDEUS SPAE, Rhapsody In Bloom, 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Tacoma

This high energy performer brought an arsenal of rapid humor, clear driving nicely punctuated vocals, guitars, banjo ukulele, trombone, guitaron, harmonica and foot cymbal to make his original and a couple of friends tunes come to life. A dozen or so folks were on the patio of this small quaint venue on a nice warm evening. From an upbeat swing on monkey and evolution he moved into "heavy metal," that is his trombone going parade style, singing and playing on "St James Infirmary." This traditional song makes for solid theatre for Spae. He first came in during the days of David Michael at Court C in 1972 playing solo, and in duos and trios. I think he said he got his first job in 1973 in those days. Thaddeus has had years of touring, recording and most recently toured with his wife as Ambertide until her death. So now he is bringing his music to the forefront on both originals, which he did here, and a host of other songs from jazz, sing, traditional, and singer songwriter. His musical knowledge is vast and his snappy learned vernacular will have you laughing and listening intently to keep up with the erudite patter. He picked up the deep rumbling acoustic Mexican bass guitar, the guitaron, and then delivered a modern Cohen/Newman like song almost the hipster 50's in style. Very strong effect. Next the four-string banjo-uke backed the upbeat "Possum Song." This was his "Irish" and "Totem" song and we got to sing along on. "The Art of the Possible" is a song of contemplation with modern sliding chords and a kind of lonely touch. Scat and upbeat driving guitar and cymbal made "Drivin' Drivin'" a tour de force road song at break neck speed. "Feelin' Much Better Now: was another guitar chord slide piece. "Street Performer Therapy" for most of us is not available at any local office, so we have to take his word, as he delivers this modern driving bluesy tune. "Good Man" is one of those songs you are not sure how to take. Are you or are you not? Loved the musicality of "Trombone Boogie" mixing traditional jazz with top improvisation and a strong beat. You got your fix on the evolution cycle "Darwin's Lament." Backed again by the crisp banjo uke. He gave good advice on how to get over anything that gets you down in "Deal With It.!" Yes, got it. We got a touch of Klezmer on a take off a traditional theme, all with a modern mood. One of my favorite Spae songs is "We Are More Than the Some Our Parts," where he backs off the push a bit. He delivers this song that can be interpreted on many levels and is smart, humorous and filled with educated vernacular. An evolution song is a finalist in the Tumbleweed Song contest in September. "Turtles All The Way Down" had me singing a long and smiling. This was a fine evening by a very talented performer, who is finding his solo voice with an eclectic mix.