



I'm With the Band

Dead Men's Hollow Member Calls Hill Home

BY AMY ROGERS NAZAROV

Thursday nights, if you're walking your dog on C Street NE around 8 p.m., you might see or hear my band practicing in our living-room window (we don't bite; we always wave back when passers-by peek in). If you happen to be carrying a banjo or harmonica, so much the better! Knock on the door and come join us.

My five bandmates and I – collectively known as Dead Men's Hollow – got together in late 2003, not to score a record deal or to land gigs, but to create our own musical camaraderie with like-minded folks. We all yearned for a musical connection with other people, and we'd done pretty well finding outlets on our own (the band is comprised of a refugee from a punk band that toured Europe, someone who studied opera in New York, and a music teacher from Ohio, among others). But when we got together to sing songs by Hank Williams Jr. and play centuries-old fiddle tunes, we tapped a deep well of shared interests – resurrecting lost melodies, writing our own material, exploring DC history in music (the band's name is the Civil War-era nickname for the Rosslyn portion of Arlington). What was to be a purely social exercise took on a life of its own.

I never imagined I'd be in a group that would play at the Kennedy Center before hundreds of people, which we've done twice as part of the wonderful Millennium Stage series, but looking back, I was always curious to see what kind of vocal blend my friends and I could create. My family and I would

sing Christmas carols around the piano in the '70s; on lazy summer afternoons, my best friend from high school and I would mimic the Indigo Girls' harmonies sitting on a dock in our Connecticut hometown. I joined choirs when I lived in California and when I came to Washington, and I was in the process of putting together an a cappella group using MeetUp.com when Caryn, another band member and a friend from a former job, asked me if I would like to come audition (in the most laid-back way possible, with a glass of red wine at the ready.) She, Belinda and I clicked vocally and socially, and that half of Dead Men's Hollow fell into place (Jared plays the upright bass, Mike the guitar and Marcy the fiddle). These days, all of us sing and play an instrument on one song or another.

It was a bit of a fluke when Dead Men's Hollow landed a live performance in Vienna, Va., in January 2004. The sheer terror I felt backstage in the last five minutes before we went on gave way to a glimmer of confidence when we nailed one of the complex all-band a cappella numbers we do. With practice, gigs got smoother; we started to understand which venues we were best suited for and how to land shows at them.

We studied how to put the Web to use as a means to showcase our songs, promote ourselves to the media, and reach out to fans who signed up for our monthly Dead Men's Hollow e-mails containing news and listings of upcoming performances. We pored over books of old folksongs and swapped

MP3s with one another and learned about the intricacies of licensing music other people wrote. We spent untold hours arranging music and practicing and driving to shows in DC, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and West Virginia. And we found a wonderful network of musicians, bookers, recording engineers – DC is just crawling with great people interested in and committed to many aspects of the music business.

With time, Dead Men's Hollow has developed its own hybrid of bluegrass, country and old-time music. Now that we've recorded and released our third CD, written a bunch of songs and played out together a few hundred times, we still pinch ourselves from time to time that it's come this far. But living on Capitol Hill, where half my neighbors are sculptors and designers and writers, makes being a full-time mom/part-time writer and musician seem pretty typical. It's through Hill friends that we secured a place to shoot our latest CD cover (Congressional Cemetery), and it's here that we collaborate on new material – and it's here where we might just be tuning up the next time you're out with Fluffy. We'll keep an eye out for you.

Dead Men's Hollow performs in front of Port City Java on Sept. 7 at 10:30 a.m. For more information about the band, see www.deadmenshollow.com and www.myspace.com/deadmenshollow. Dead Men's Hollow's music is for sale at Borders, iTunes and Amazon.com.

★

Local bluegrass/old-time band Dead Men's Hollow (www.deadmenshollow.com) includes (l. to r.) Caryn Fox, Belinda Hardesty, Hill resident Amy Nazarov, Marcy Cochran, Jared Creason and Mike Clayberg. Shot in Congressional Cemetery. Photo credit: Brett Davis (www.brettonealdavis.com)

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