

Mover & Shaker

Interview with Uncle Steve (aka Derek Stephen McPhail)

Creative Culture: Who are you and what do you do?

Uncle Steve: I am a Canadian Métis, born at Sault Ste. Marie, northern Ontario. Over the past ten years, I have been active as a project coordinator with Frontiers Foundation, a non-profit Canadian Aboriginal organization. This fall, I recently completed three music CDs and am currently tying up the loose ends of the production of a friend's CD/DVD project, upgrading my website and completing a Frontiers promotional video. I am primarily a singer, songwriter and guitarist. Currently, I am developing a western feature film screenplay called "The Outlaw Trail".

CC: Tell me more about how you got involved with the Frontiers Foundation.

US: In the late 1990's, I met Charles Catto, the founding director of Frontiers Foundation Inc., in Toronto. Frontiers Foundation partners with Canadian Aboriginal communities, primarily focusing on home and community construction projects. I was impressed to discover Charles had recognized how Canadian Aboriginal people need to build their own homes, instead of relying on government contractors. For 48 years, Frontiers has struggled, with minimal help from the government, to support Aboriginal communities to become economically self-sufficient. With the support of volunteers & the donations of building materials and portable sawmill technology, things can now only get better. Only recently has Frontiers had the budget and staff to begin properly marketing its activities. In the summer of 1999, I gave up good paying work as a staging technician and began work as a volunteer project coordinator for Frontiers Foundation.

CC: You were recently introduced to the Okanagan Band Council by your friend Edwin Kolausok, their Director of Economic Development, in Vernon. It seems they are interested in possible future collaboration on log home construction training and possibly other programs you have been developing, in support of energy self-sufficiency. This has led you to develop a plan for green energy farms. Can you tell me about that?

US: My Green Energy Farm proposal, encouraging energy independence, began with an earlier Hemp Works proposal. Canada still lacks the hemp processing infrastructure to motivate more farmers to grow industrial hemp crops, despite its wonderful attributes & usefulness. My idea was to design & develop decentralized preliminary processing facilities across Canada in First Nations communities. Despite hemp being a natural fertilizer & originally useful for the manufacture of paper, linen, fibre-glass, canvas, rope, etc., it is also the crop with the highest yield per acre of organic bio-mass, ideal for cellulosic ethanol production. The Canadian federal government has been very slow to support Canadian companies who have been pioneers in the development of the cellulosic ethanol process, as a form of clean energy. This process uses natural enzymes to break down compost, wood chips, and organic municipal waste into sugar that can be distilled into ethanol, the cleanest burning, non-toxic fuel alternative to petro-gas. My interest in bio-fuel evolved into the Green Energy Farm proposal, including other green strategies.

CC: Back to your music, how long have you been playing music and how did it all begin?

US: On my tenth birthday, my parents bought me a cheap Stella guitar and guitar lessons with a middle-aged matronly neighbour, named Mrs. Tallon. She accepted me into her beginner guitar class, and surprised me & my classmates with her soulfulness. Over the years I've been active as a singer/songwriter/guitarist and actor in theatre and film. However, it has been difficult to support myself as a performing artist.

CC: What led to your musical collaboration with Eduardo Teja?

US: Fifteen years ago, I met Eduardo through the garageband.com website, which encourages musicians to write reviews and develop creative relationships. Ed later started his own publishing company, Float Street Music, and I became his first client. Our mutual interest in sailing inspired my solo acoustic sea shanty CD, "Sea Fever".

CC: How did you get into producing video and what is your favorite part of the process?

US: I began working as a script editor, producing corporate training videos & interactive laser discs for a consultant firm, before dubbing music videos and TV commercials for City TV's Much Music. I enjoy the complete process of photography, sound score, editing, design and packaging of DVD projects. Go to www.beerweazl.com and checkout my body of work, including my latest CD releases: "Spirit Warriors", "Canajun Blues" and "Pargo Rojo".

