



# In the Spot Light...

## Roger Hammer

by Andrew Kehe



Like his 80s hip-hop name sake on a national scale, when a tall, lanky, blond-haired Nebraskan takes the stage around these parts, it's Hammer Time.

For patrons at the Thursday night jam at Champions, it means a set of solid low-end sounds are coming their way from the skilled bass playing of Roger Hammer. Always consistent, never overbearing, Roger sets a standard and represents the essence of what the blues jam is all about. "Roger seeks out every opportunity to play his music and has made a great contribution as a regular at our Thursday jam," said frequent jam host and performer Rocky Rothrock. "He's a well-rounded musician with a strong creative streak."

And at coffee houses, wineries, lounges, Susquehanna Folk Music Society and BSCP events, and festivals all over the area, Roger picks up an electric acoustic guitar and joins his guitar playing partner John Drudul, better known as JD, forming the Roger Hammer Music Duo. The duo chooses from a collection of more than 100 original, blues-inspired folk-rock tunes Roger has written, culled from his life experiences, the outdoors, science and causes close to Roger's heart. "I'm a tree-hugger. I like green stuff, taking care of the environment. I'm kind of a peace-nick and I'm proud of it," he says.

He's more than that. Hold on to your 12-bar blues.

There's another academically and technically diverse world in which Roger lays down the hammer, in which he has and still does put to use his Master's degree from prestigious Northwestern University to help companies solve issues ranging from environmental technology and data management strategies to integrating materials technologies to achieve sustainable business results.

He's currently an engineering systems analyst for TE Connectivity. He spent 22 years at Motorola, 10 at Shure, the microphone and turntable needle people.

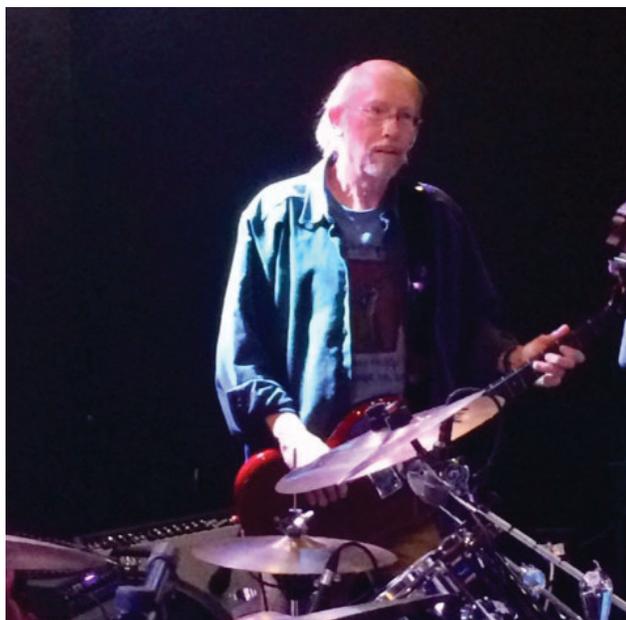
In the business world he is known as Roger Lee Franz – yes, Hammer is a stage name, just as MC Hammer is for Stanley Kirk Burrell. In that universe, Roger is a published author of more than three dozen technical journal articles and has on occasion been sought out to speak on various technical and environmental challenges facing companies.

Honestly, you can't touch this.

"I've not risen to the top of one thing, but tried to climb the ladder on a few," says Roger, who often jets off to his Chicago suburban home in Mundelein, Ill. to spend time with his wife Nancy, his three grown children and two dogs. "Hundreds of years ago, there was a so-called Renaissance Man, who cut across specialties and was fairly good at some of them. That's me. "If I'm proud of anything, it's playing for local events for real people. If they get some of what I'm singing about, which often crosses many barriers, I'm thrilled."

JD has witnessed first-hand the many sides of his partner and admits to sometimes being challenged by the arrangements Roger comes up with.

"Playing with Roger the past four years has been both enjoyable and a challenge due to his unorthodox musical arrangement style," JD says. "Sometimes his arrangements are off the charts. Maybe that's what makes him unique. He keeps my guitar playing moving forward." At the jam, it's different, for both. There's some overlap, but for the most part the jam offers a setting in which Roger says he can relax, get in the pocket and just play.



"I love playing the bass," he says. "I don't have to think about it, I don't have to be the biggest shredder on the block, but when the tune builds then I try to play with more emotion."

Like the majority of long-time jammers, Roger can play a multitude of instruments (piano, sax, clarinet and slide among them) and has played in dozens of bands over time as he's hopped-scotched from Nebraska to Iowa to Chicago and now Harrisburg – community orchestras, rock bands, folk bands, rock-folk, country, disco, and yes, biker. "I'm lucky to be alive," he says of his biker band ride.

He's been influenced by bands who were heavily influenced themselves by the blues – Bob Dylan, The Stones, The Beatles, The Animals and others. At age 15, he and a few buddies formed The Statesmen, and he's been making statements with his music ever since.



“There’s really nothing but tomorrow. Worrying about what you don’t know is never going to be a better way. Nothing about tomorrow should make you feel afraid. Keeping looking out the window tomorrow’s just another day. Get up off your past and move ahead.”  
 - - - “Tomorrow” off Roger’s third CD “Up in the Air.”

“Those words pretty well explain the way I was feeling at the time,” Roger said. “Don’t feel sorry for yourself. It’s kind of an anthem saying, ‘hey let’s do it. Get off the past, get off your ass and move on to the next thing.’”

Roger has pretty much taken his own advice and moved forward when the previous set of circumstances ran its course. The vibe in Harrisburg was almost immediately promising when he was directed to the Blues Society jam at Liquid 891 by a music shop keeper a week after arriving.

“So, I went and didn’t bring anything, but a guy lent me his bass so I got up and played,” Roger said. “It was exciting. There were people there who would lend me their instrument. Back in Chicago you can’t find anybody who would do that. I found family there. I felt right at home.” “I love playing the jam and love playing out with JD.”

In his late 60s, there seems to be no turning back Hammer Time. Not on stage, not in the business world, not in the universe of social change.

He’s just, well . . . too legit to quit.

