

Mike Compton, a musician's musician, has rightly earned a reputation as one of the best and most influential mandolin players in acoustic music today. Grammy award winner, nominated IBMA Mandolin Player of the Year, and musical US Ambassador throughout the world, Mike has entertained at Carnegie Hall, at the White House, and been honored by the Mississippi State Senate commending his musical accomplishments.

Compton is a preservationist, continuing the music that Bill Monroe innovated on the mandolin and which set the standard for two generations of bluegrass mandolin players.

Over a span of 35 years, Compton has made a career playing on recordings adding his signature sound and flavor to many fantastic recordings over the years. Mike has made music with such diverse notables as the iconic mountain music man Ralph Stanley, British rock legend Elvis Costello and the Sugarcanes, guitar virtuoso David Grier, and producer T-Bone Burnett (O Brother, Where Art Thou and Down From The Mountain tours). When the Nashville Bluegrass Band was being put together, Mike was their first choice on mandolin, creating a "band like a marriage made in heaven." In 1994, Mike became a sideman for John Hartford, whom he performed with until Hartford's death. To date, Mike has performed on over 110 CDs in a variety of genres, with some of the most beloved artists of our day.

The New York Times has called Compton a "new bluegrass instrumental hero."

David Grier is regarded as one of the premier acoustic guitarists in the world, along with his early influences, Doc Watson, Tony Rice, and family friend Clarence White. He is the most award-winning guitarist in recent memory, and was named an Artist of the Decade in 2000 by Guitar Player magazine. David has received the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) Guitar Player of the Year award 3 times, and has played on 4 Grammy award-winning albums, including True Life Blues-A Tribute to Bill Monroe and The Great Dobro Sessions. David is also included in the book, 1,000 Great Guitarists.

His most recent release, Evocative (Dreadnought 2009), featuring 10 original tunes and a rich complement of collaborators (Victor Wooten, Paul Franklin, Stuart Duncan and more), has been hailed for its "deep musical introspection" as well as its "unmatchable mastery of the guitar" (Martin Mull).

"David Grier is a willful, accurate instrumentalist whose every note seems to run through a bright, intelligent sieve. He maintains an unqualified standard of excellence in guitar playing, always with a knack for unorthodox surprise."

~ Claire Lynch

Together, these two supremely talented pickers play with a rapport that is nothing short of uncanny. This is partly because the quality of musicianship is so high. But an even larger reason is that the picking of Mike Compton and David Grier (like that of their respective mentors) is so consistently unpredictable. The unexpected surprise may come from the way Compton takes one of his "Billisms" (as he refers to his [musical] quotes from Monroe) and stands it on its head or it may come from one of Grier's startling melodic leaps or chokes. Whatever its twists and turns, though, this is music that shows subtlety and sophistication.

In the 1990's, Compton and Grier team up on Climbing the Walls to create a music rich in tradition. This all-instrumental album covers many familiar, traditional tunes, like "Black Mountain Rag" and Bill Monroe's "Going up Caney." The group performs a lively version of "Honky Tonk Swing" with imaginative solos and much of this material is upbeat and played at a quick tempo. Several pieces stray from tradition but add a pleasing diversity to the album. "Bye Bye Blues" offers perhaps the most unusual arrangement, creating a swing jazz feel by adding Paul Martin Zonn on clarinet. Grier plays several fascinating solos on this instrumental, adding blues phrasings to his usual quick flat-picking. Two other standouts include "Waters Street Waltz" and "Paul's Blues," two measured instrumentals. The first is a relaxed waltz, with a gently rolling guitar solo and extended fiddle break. The later piece features Compton and is tinged with an Eastern European air. Both "Black Mountain Rag" and "The New Five Cents," a pair of mandolin/guitar duets, contain some picking that is simply astonishing and stand as the purest statements of what this partnership is all about.

Duos that feature mandolin and guitar have been an important part of country music since the 1920's and '30's, when artists like the Monroe Brothers, Mac and Bob, the Blue Sky Boys, and the Callahan Brothers held sway. Those duos were primarily vocal acts, however and it wasn't until the early 1960's - when Homer and Jethro recorded "It Ain't Necessarily Square" and "Playing it Straight" - that mandolin/guitar instrumental duets really began to generate much excitement.

Mike Compton and David Grier, two of the most gifted pickers in Nashville (or anywhere else, for that matter) bring the tradition into the 90's with "Climbing the Walls," an extraordinary CD that will amaze even the most jaded listener. It's a dazzling display of sheer virtuosity and as fine a collection of instrumentals as you'll hear all year.

Compton and Grier understand each others playing so well, that something closely akin to telepathy is achieved.