

Stone Soup

Stone Soup is a trio of seasoned musicians who present an acoustic-style collection of songs that have been culled from a wonderful variety of sources—traditional American idioms, the singer-songwriter vein, blues and roots music, mid-20th century gems, and more. Each song is chosen for its special value (call it greatness), then interpreted with imagination and love, and performed with the signature energy and depth of the group. The result is unique, powerful, and excitingly diverse.

Founded by vocalist/guitarist Peter Kim-Fredell circa 1995 and based in the Rochester area of upstate New York, Stone Soup has repeatedly been featured at all the major acoustic-music venues in the area (past and present), including the Turtle Hill Music Festival, The Golden Link Concert Series, the Oswego Music Hall, the Twelve Corners Coffeehouse, and the Heartland Concert Series.

Stone Soup has one nationally released CD album to date, receiving an enthusiastic notice from the major music magazine *Dirty Linen*, as well as local acclaim in *City* and the *D&C*. Radio stations took notice as well, and the included version of the Appalachian classic Shady Grove was added to a number of playlists.

The current evolution of Stone Soup joins frontman Peter KF with bass player and backing vocalist Jeff Cole (a former major label recording artist) and master drummer John Bagale.

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PROFILE

When you have experienced musicians with wide-ranging musical interests who come together to form a unique ensemble, the whole is not only greater than the sum of its parts (as the old saw says)—that greater whole is infused with the divine afflatus of musical rapport and interplay. But it is nonetheless good to know the parts:

Peter Kim-Fredell, lead vocals and acoustic guitar

Peter likes to point out that he started playing guitar “before everybody and their brother were playing the guitar.” He joined his first gigging band in the seventh grade (trumpet, sax, trombone, guitar and drums). In eighth grade he and the drummer left to join a real rock and roll band with some older guys. By the time he was fifteen he had taken over the lead singer slot and written several songs for the group. At seventeen he had begun developing the acoustic side, coming under the influence of artists like Dave Van Ronk, Buffy Saint-Marie, Tom Rush, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan, and Joni Mitchell. He started college as a tuba player at music school, but that didn’t take. Not too long after came a touring stint in the Boston area as rock band lead singer, and a back and forth pattern between acoustic “folksinger” and electrified “rock etc. guy” was set, until a plunge into world music complicated the design. When he founded Stone Soup, it became his primary vehicle for group expression, but he also produces solo studio projects of original music.

Jeffery S. Cole, bass and backing vocals

Born in St. Petersburg, Florida, Jeff started with guitar and violin at age 6 and in his teens began to play rock and roll music inspired by bands like the Beatles, The Band, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Jimi Hendrix, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and Spirit. After playing in several groups, he formed the group known as Tin House. This three-piece band was signed by Columbia Records and recorded two albums on the Epic label. (Tin House was managed by Steve Paul, who also managed Johnny Winter, Edgar Winter and White Trash, and Rick Derringer.) The band played such storied venues as The Fillmore East, Chicago’s East Town Ballroom, The Scene, The Rock Pile, and the Capital Theatre in Montreal, Canada, and shared tour dates with such household names as Johnny Winter, Edgar Winter, Alice Cooper, Fleetwood Mac, Seals and Croft, Jethro Tull, and the Steve Miller Band. After several years, Jeff left the band to pursue a career in the Visual Arts as a studio-artist, teacher, and assisting professor at Rochester Institute of Technology. Musical performance also led to an interest in instrument building, which began a career as a builder of concert classical guitars, lutes, and harpsichords.

John Bagale, drum set and harmony vocals

John has performed and taught music in the Rochester area for over thirty years. He has also composed music for television, film and dance. He holds music degrees from Nazareth College and the Eastman School of Music. Currently, John teaches music theory/composition, general music and music technology at Penfield High School. He lives in Pittsford with his wife Moire and two Australian Shepherds. Together they have three sons, each of whom are in the music business.

Some Stone Soup History

In the beginning, there was a body of acoustic music put together by Peter KF over many years. Although at the time he was playing in the evocatively named and fully electrified Uncle Thump (doing in equal parts originals—many of which he was contributing—and R&R standards), he was not satisfied. The acoustic side was languishing. He had taken the acoustic music out in solo fashion from time to time, but he decided that it was time to flesh out the guitar and vocal arrangements with more instrumentation. In a canny founding stroke—one that would set a precedent for the kind of inventiveness that has always defined the group—he skirted convention and hooked up with accordionist Ed Marris, forming the original Stone Soup. They performed as a two-piece for several years, adding some Celtic and Cajun numbers that Ed brought to Peter's already eclectic mix of songs. There are some extant recordings from this period, but to a large extent it remains undocumented.

Seeking to make the rhythmic dimension more explicit, they brought in ethno-musician Sonam for percussion, and over time worked in his multi-instrumental wind and horn playing, and a choice selection of the ethnic music he brought along. Since both Ed and Peter were able percussionists in their own right, this situation afforded them the opportunity to take turns at playing the rhythmist.

An unprecedented breadth of eclecticism now became the signature of the group. Playing together for over a decade, this ensemble brought a totally unique mix of music to the premier venues for acoustic music in the region, getting booked on concert schedules alongside any number of fine and famous acts on the circuit. In 2001 the group released a critically acclaimed CD album.

Eventually another player came to the group's attention, and was pulled in—Jeff Cole, a talented bassist and backing vocalist with a couple of major label albums lurking in his past. A couple years went along in four-piece fashion, producing some memorable shows.

After more than a decade, major change is probably inevitable. Ed Marris discovered greener grass in the Catskills and relocated, and Sonam decided to concentrate on his own musical interests, leaving Peter and Jeff to carry on. They lost no time enlisting drummer John Bagale, whose exceptional skill on the drumkit and wide-ranging musical sensibility was a match for the unusual Stone Soup mix of styles.

With the current configuration, Stone Soup has come somewhat full circle. The group was founded on the premise that acoustic music—both traditional and singer/songwriter tunes, and also re-workings of songs that were not originally done acoustically—could be arranged in creative ways that strongly brought out the rhythmic dimensions as an essential part of reaching deeply into the emotional heart of the melodic/harmonic content. The focus has now returned (albeit with a signature degree of variety) almost exclusively to songs, and with the current fine rhythm section in place, those songs are set forth with an undeniable and irresistible rhythmic pulse.