

http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/blogs/music_blog/scott-ainslie-immerses-himself-in-rural-and-working-class-traditions/article_ab3b19b2-d231-11e8-b096-dbdd63255643.html

Scott Ainslie immerses himself in rural and working class traditions, and we benefit.

Liz MacDonald Oct 17, 2018

After the latest news cycle, we could all use some rebalancing. Musician, educator and storyteller Scott Ainslie aims to bring a bit of that to his upcoming performance at The Lab on Sunday, Oct. 21.

“The country is in real danger of simply blowing apart. Music is my tool for addressing that and trying to rebalance us,” he says. “A high bar that I don’t pretend to make, but it keeps me out of the pool halls...”

The acoustic blues guitarist, singer and songwriter bearing a 1931 metal-bodied National Resonator guitar, a Froggy Bottom acoustic, a fretless gourd banjo, and a homemade one-string cigar box guitar will sing songs, tell stories, and try to “leave listeners moved and slightly—painlessly—better educated about America’s music and the history that gives it meaning.”

A lifelong musician, Ainslie says his mother found him at the piano, picking out the melodies of the records she used to play

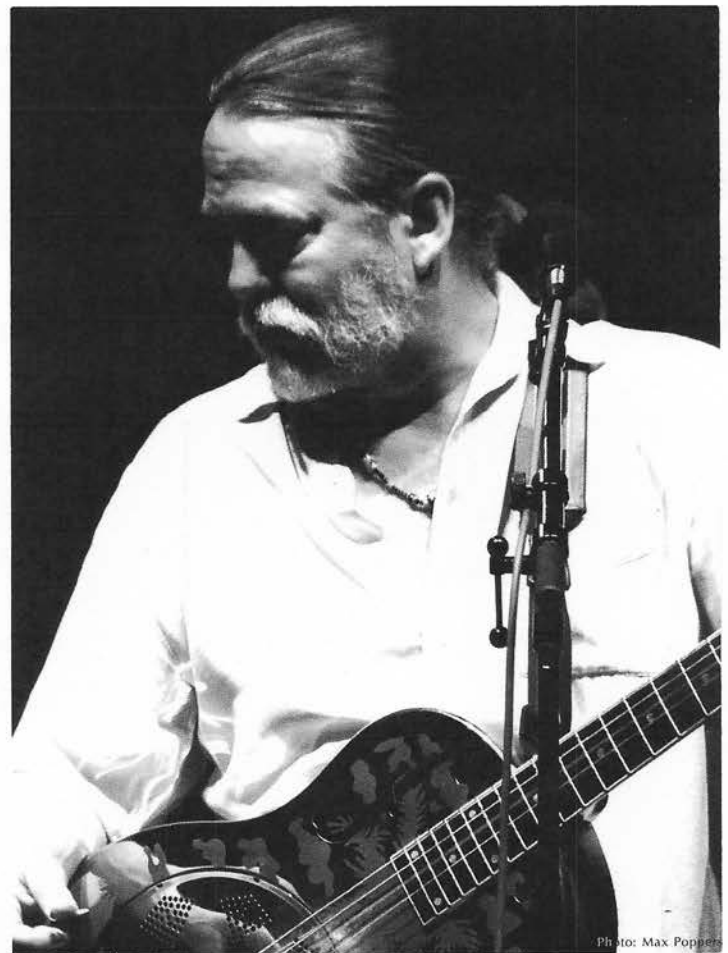


Photo: Max Poppers

Max Poppers

when he just three years old. He played any instrument he could get his hands on as a kid, but in 1967, at age 15, he saw John Jackson, a northern Virginia grave digger and bluesman, drop in to play a few songs at a Mike Seeger concert.

“John took the stage and settled down and proceeded to play the most astonishingly complex and interesting music on solo acoustic guitar I’d ever heard. By the time he was done, I was a guitar player,” Ainslie recalls.

After that, Ainslie made it his mission to discover and learn to play the music that captivated him. “As a musician, it was the sound that drew me to blues and to all other music,” he points out. “But, the reward for being attracted to the sound has been the people.”

Ainslie befriended John Jackson, and made it a practice to apprentice himself to other elder black musicians across the mid-Atlantic and Southern United States. “My strategy for learning music is to find the oldest person with their sense who still plays and go visit with them, play with them, if possible,” says Ainslie.

In addition to mastering acoustic blues guitar, he also explored the vocal techniques of African American singers. He was mentored by traditional black vocalists and studied African religious practices and the cultural and spiritual reasons that white Europeans and African-Americans sang the way they sang.

“Over the past 40 years, I have learned something about this,” he explains. “I have my license to sing from the old people I knew. Without that, I’d probably be singing country music.”

Through his relationships, Ainslie developed an expertise in traditional blues, slave and work songs, R & B and jazz, which he’ll perform and contextualize during his set. “I have a specialized knowledge and experience that a few others have,” he says. “I don’t want to die as a cul-de-sac, but a bridge or conduit. I can think of no better use of white privilege than to try to balance our knowledge and present our history.”

So if the present moment has you feeling a little off-kilter, perhaps a dose of Ainslie’s music will help. As he says, “When you cross what are characterized as cultural barriers—race, educational background, economic status, religion—the keys to admission seem to me to be love and respect.”

Scott Ainslie 4:30 pm Sunday, Oct. 21. The Lab, 3728 The Barnyard, Suite G 23, Carmel. \$20 donation. thelabarts.com.