

SETH BERNARD: MUSICIAN, ENTERTAINER, COMMUNICATOR

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By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I had heard of Seth Bernard but had not yet met him. As a father with three daughters and one son, I am always interested in who is dating my daughters. Isn't this part of what it means to be a father?

My daughter May, who was an up-and-coming singer and songwriter at the time, told me about a tiny festival or music event somewhere out in the woods where there were more mosquitoes than musicians. May had gone there to see a band she knew called "Bodega." Anyway, at this event she heard a musician by the name of Seth Bernard. She was very enthused and I could not tell whether she liked his music, his person, or both. Obviously, in retrospect, it was both.

That is the first time Seth Bernard came up on my date-my-daughter radar. Who was this guy? Well I got to find out for myself. May talked me into going to a small musical event held in late September on a farm up near Lake City Michigan, an event held after all the summer festivals are over. In fact it is purposely not called a festival but rather a "gathering" where musicians play music with and for one another. The musicians are their own audience and non-musicians are not the primary audience.

OK, I told May, I will check this out and so my wife and I went to our first "Harvest Gathering." And I clearly remember May pointing out Seth Bernard as we were walking down a little dirt road next to the maple sugar shack on the farm where the gathering was held. The Earthwork Farm is owned by Seth's dad Bob Bernard and it also has a honey house (bees) and a working sawmill.

Anyway there in front of me was this young man with a beard and a stocking hat pulled down on his forehead. He had long brown hair. Of course I had to give him the scrutinizing eye (like Larry David does on "Curb Your Enthusiasm") and check him out. And looking back at me were these warm brown eyes and a great big smile. So this was Seth Bernard. I guess he passed the test because that's the last I remember about the scrutinizing. And that was just the beginning.

As it turned out the Harvest Gathering was not like a regular festival. It was so much more. In fact it was the closest thing to the Be-ins and Love-ins from the 1960s that I had experienced since back in the day. And hugs were all around. You couldn't walk across the yard without hugging someone or someone hugging you, like it or not, so I had to take a refresher course in hugging right there and then. It was *déjà vu*.

That first Harvest Gathering was one of those events that you don't even know how important they are till you get home and feel lonely. It was like I had left something important back there on the farm. I felt like getting in the car and heading back up there. That's when I knew I was hooked. It has been many years since that first gathering and Margaret and I look forward to them every September as one of the landmark events in our year. Anyway that is where and when I first met Seth Bernard.

My next memory is that my father's eyebrow again got raised when Seth came and performed in the home-style restaurant which we ran, "The Two Sisters." It was crystal clear that this young man singing on the stage was singing not just to the audience but also to my daughter May.

There was no mistake and in particular there was this song "Travel" that Seth sang. The lyrics went something like this:

"I have no love to ease my mind,
And so I love the road
I have no one to show me how,
But I have a guide inside.

Peace is scarce in this old world,
And I have no place to hide.

"I saw such beauty through her eyes,
She said I had a home in her,
But I walked away from those bright eyes,
To become a traveler.

"And so I travel from town to town,
Singing songs about her eyes.
I travel so I know my way,
Travel till I die, Travel till I die.

"I travel for to know the land,
And learn to speak with everyone.
And I will work this broken world,
Until my days are done,
Until my days are done.

You can hear it here if you wish:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hDNLK-vP0s>

That song was the moment that I knew these two were meant for one another. I too was on board. I even remember making a phone call to Seth that might have insured that they got together. They got married this last summer.

I found that like the singer/songwriters I knew back in the early 1960s, like Dylan and Joan Baez, Seth was all about community and helping out. He had single-handedly started the "Water Festival" here in Michigan to protect the water in the Great Lakes (1/5th of the world's fresh water) from the multi-conglomerates who are already crowding Michigan to take the fresh water elsewhere. Water Festivals are now held all over the state each year. And there is a lot more. Trying to stop the sulfide mining in Michigan's Upper Peninsula was another cause. My daughter May soon joined Seth in this work and the two are endlessly doing benefit concerts and pro-bono work to help the disadvantaged and the threatened environment.

Well, that is an introduction to Seth Bernard as I know him. There is a lot more to tell but I will save it for another time. Meanwhile if you want to see some photos or listen to some tunes, check this out:

<http://sethandmay.com/>