

# keyboard and plastic duck

Welcome to the strange and wonderful world of  
**Keyboard and Plastic Duck!**

❖ In this musical realm the surprising wordscapes of **Susan Gilbert** are brushed and spattered over an inventive sonic canvas by an unlikely quartet, to create music which most pleasantly addles the wits.

❖ As the "keyboard" of **Keyboard and Plastic Duck**, Susan has created an unruly collection of delightfully eccentric songs that manages to be simultaneously kooky and profound. You may find yourself gently confused, drifting through ballads on the lilting flute of **Richard Curtis**, or wryly amused, marching to raucous, mirthful tunes that evoke the pot-and-pan processions of childhood, or cosmically moved, as you are jettisoned through atmospheric soundscapes spontaneously crafted by percussionist **Bill Wagner** and bassist **Nate Bynum**. **Keyboard and Plastic Duck** cleverly nudges you along into a new musical landscape, oddly familiar but slightly skewed.

❖ Originally a trio, with Susan Gilbert's keyboard and vocals, Richard Curtis on flute, and Bill Wagner with an unusual array of percussion, they became a quartet in 2000 when they lured Nate Bynum out of hiding with the promise of a weekly gourmet meal. Nate plays electric bass, as well as toy accordion, melodica and bowed saw. They are currently working on their first CD.

*contact information:*

**keyboard and plastic duck**

684 Adams Road, Frankfort, MI 49635

telephone: (231) 352-6513 or (231) 929-9605

website: [www.plasticduck.net](http://www.plasticduck.net)

email: Susan Gilbert at [susan@plasticduck.net](mailto:susan@plasticduck.net)

or Richard Curtis at [rlc@plasticduck.net](mailto:rlc@plasticduck.net)

## a few quotes:

*"Even if you didn't speak a word of English, this would be fascinating stuff, and the lyrics are as outrageously creative as the music. It's all out on the fringes of song, but somehow makes you feel right at home there. Everyone in this quartet is in love with sound, and so is elaborately gentle with it, whether lyrically or musically. As an experience, Keyboard and Plastic Duck is thoroughly delightful."*

-Peter Berryman, of Lou and Peter Berryman

*"The first time I heard Plastic Duck, I thought I was dreaming--as it turns out, I was."*

-Tony Drake, Transmat recording artist

*"The music of K&PD is a beautiful balance of edgy and ethereal. The listener can't wait to hear what will come next from song to song."* -Claudia Schmidt

*"The song lyrics exist in a refreshing dimension, a dimension that is unexpectedly, charmingly, twittily offbeat. What a pleasure to be taken by surprise!"*

-Sarah Bearup-Neal

*"Your songs are a real treasure for a world grown cynical and dark."*

-Mary Anne Rivers

## one (or two) word quotes:

*"charming... authentic... fantastic... playful... wonderfully original... strange... clever... cool... whimsical... mesmerizing... arresting... funny... smart... different... fresh... joyful... quirky... lovely... surrealistic orgasm!"* -various listeners and fans

also see the article by Robert Downes of *Northern Express* on the following page...

<http://www.plasticduck.net>

## **The Outsiders: Keyboard & Plastic Duck offer spacey sounds from the vortex of creativity**

by **Robert Downes** – editor of *Northern Express* and *Express Weekly* – May 8, 2003

Many musicians talk about being edgy, creative or that worst of all adjectives -- "unique" -- but few succeed to the extent of Keyboard & Plastic Duck, who take creativity to its outer limit with oddball instruments, unusual rhythms and thoughtful, off-kilter songs of a quirky, whimsical nature.

Made up of keyboardist/songwriter/vocalist Susan Gilbert, flutist Richard Curtis, percussionist Bill Wagner and bassist Nate Bynum from the Grand Traverse/Leelanau/Benzie area, the avant-garde band has been simmering at the edges of Northern Michigan's coffeehouse and benefit scene since their formation in November, 1999.

As their website ([www.plasticduck.net](http://www.plasticduck.net)) aptly notes, "Keyboard and Plastic Duck cleverly nudges you along into a new musical landscape, oddly familiar but slightly skewed." Wagner, for instance, has a drum kit that includes a number of tin cans to clink out tinkling rhythms, while Bynum is an instrument collector who performs on toy accordian, bowed saw and the melodica (a whistle with piano keys) in addition to bass. Again, to quote their website, "You may find yourself gently confused, drifting through ballads on the lilting flute of Richard Curtis, or wryly amused, marching to raucous, mirthful tunes that evoke the pot-and-pan processions of childhood, or cosmically moved, as you are jettisoned through atmospheric soundscapes spontaneously crafted..."

Gilbert is the creative wellspring of the band. She began writing songs spontaneously in her late 40s, following up on a background as a painter and a poet. The advent of motherhood prompted her to put her creative efforts on the backburner for several years, but once her children were in college and high school, she found herself moved to expression in an unforeseen direction.

"Suddenly, I wrote a song out of the blue and liked it so much that I started writing a bunch of them," she recalls of her development as a musician. "It was kind of an extension of my painting. I would write songs early in the morning before the kids got up.

"A lot of people said they were very colorful," she adds. "But I never tried to be a folksinger or to play guitar. The songs came to me more from an art direction."

Although Gilbert had played the piano since childhood, she had never been before a microphone when she debuted as a songwriter. "I didn't know what to do with the songs, but I tried singing them. I think I was pretty bad at first, but my friends were patient with me."

She was invited to perform six of her songs at a Sol Michaels Folk Festival in Traverse City in 1997, and enlisted the aid of classically-trained flutist Curtis for support. Called upon to repeat her performance a year later, Wagner and Bynum were recruited.

The band's first official show as Keyboard & Plastic Duck was at Kejara's Bridge in Lake Leelanau. Their quirky name came about after Gilbert and Wagner recorded a jam session with him performing on a duck-shaped ocarina. Reflecting on their recording, they decided to call it "music for keyboard and plastic duck," and the name struck home for their new group.

In terms of pedigree, the band hails from music's tradition of artists flexing their creative muscles in other media. Electronic music whiz Brian Eno and the members of Roxy Music, for instance, were art school chums who'd never played instruments before launching one of the most creative bands of the '70s. Gilbert cites Erik Satie, a composer from the early 20th century who played odd combinations of chords and modal arrangements. Her songs have also been compared to those of performance artist and spoken-word diva Laurie Anderson. Gilbert also writes some spoken-word material, but hadn't heard of Anderson until listeners commented on similarities.

"We're not sure of what kind of music it is, but I guess we call it art," she says. "Like a space lounge sound. We also call ourselves an outsider band, which relates to outsider art. But you can't really call yourselves outsiders, because someone else has to say that about you. It's a movement in art that is untrained but inspired in some way."

Gilbert writes lovely lyrics and melodies such as "Eleanor," a tribute to former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her appearance on a postage stamp. The song was a request in honor of Women's History Month.

Mostly, however, the words and melodies come unbidden. "There's usually a phrase running around my head or a statement or words, and I sit down at the piano and gather the song from the void," she says.

She likes Harbor Springs-area songwriter Kirby's definition of the creative process: "Kirby says there's a vortex coming down to your pen from the atmosphere, and the song ideas come down through you. Most of what I write are fairly spontaneous -- I hardly ever start with the music."

Members of K&PD represent every decade from the 1940s to the 1970s, providing an intergenerational dynamic you'll find in few other bands. They're currently in the process of recording songs for their first CD, due out later this year.

Paying gigs for a band focusing on art rather than dance grooves have been rare. The band's performances have ranged from churches and coffeehouses to a number of benefits, including the NMC Green Party's Earth Day rally at Union Street. In an attempt to play catch up, they're hosting a benefit for themselves this Saturday in Lake Ann, with additional performances by Detroit area solo songwriters Alison Lewis of the Twilight Babies and Tony Fink. If you're looking for truly creative sounds, this show is your ticket to the real deal.