

All the pieces fit in *Dysfunctional* band's new album

By JON POTTER
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GUILFORD — With its artful musical mix of jazz, rock, folk, funk, blues, reggae, soul, bossa and more, and its equally easy lyrical turns from serious to sublime, the new CD “Come Over” does pose problems — at least for people who try to categorize it.

“People ask me ‘What bin would it be in?’” said Patty Carpenter, creative driving force and co-lead singer on the new CD by the Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band. “We want to be in the ‘Dysfunctional’ bin.”

Actually, if there's one bin the CD doesn't belong in, it's the one marked “dysfunctional.” “Come Over” is a CD on which all the pieces fit; one whose diverse songs tell an engaging, coherent story. It's a seasoned, soulful work with depth and real feeling to go with strong chops.

“We really wanted to make an old-fashioned album,” said Carpenter, a veteran area musician whom many know from the all-women band No Regrets. “It's a very personal story, but I think there's something for everyone.”

The 12 songs on “Come Over” were written by Carpenter and Verandah Porche, who became friends in the early

1970s when both were living on area communes. Seasoned by time and experience, that friendship is celebrated on the CD — which ponders the ups and downs of country living, life choices, raising kids, finding and losing love and balances it all with plenty of hopes and dreams.

“‘Come Over’ is about how Verandah and I helped each other through ... everything,” Carpenter said. “It's about how do you live your life ... it's about trying to do some good in the world while also having a life.”

It is in that spirit that the Carpenter and the Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band are launching the CD with an event that melds activism with just plain fun. This Sunday, beginning at 3 p.m., Carpenter, her bandmates and many other friends will present a live benefit concert for the Vermont Citizens Awareness Network, a grassroots environmental



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organization working to end the use of nuclear power in the Northeast and replace it with sustainable, reliable and affordable energy generation.

The event also features a potluck picnic, spoken word sections and narrative with Porche, a musical ramble (a structured jam session in the tradition of Levon Helm) and a dance concert featuring some top musicians from Boston, New York and the local area. The Sun Dogs, a local trio featuring Dan Dewalt, Derrick Jordan, and Johnny Yuma, open the show.

It all takes place at the Organ Barn of Tree Frog Farm in Guilford, a site of local activism since its founding by the late Andy Kopkind, a renowned journalism. It's also a fitting site because “Come Over” celebrates people whose lifelong friendships began on and around that very site.

The idea to release the album as a benefit was the idea of Carpenter and her husband and the album's executive producer, Charles Light, a filmmaker who has produced many documentaries on the nuclear issue.

“I became anti-nuclear a long time ago, but you don't have to be against nuclear power to want to close Vermont



The Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band is, from left, Patty Carpenter, Melissa Shetler and Scott Shetler. Submitted photo

Yankee,” said Carpenter. “I'm encouraged by the Vermont Senate vote to close Yankee, but we know that Entergy will not give up that easily and the coming year will be crucial in this fight. I was really glad to celebrate our victories over the past year along with the album release, and to use the launch party for ‘Come Over’ to help make sure that Vermont Yankee is closed in 2012.”

But the event is not just for opponents of Vermont Yankee. Mixing activism with enjoyment is what it's all about, Carpenter said. The intent is to welcome all people, no matter what their views, and to simply have fun. Music and dance, food and friendship have a way of bringing people together.

“It's this idea that you can dance for a good cause,” said Melissa Shetler, co-lead vocalist and Carpenter's daughter.

And here is as good a place as any to ponder just how dysfunctional the Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band is. Matriarch Carpenter shares vocals with her daughter, Melissa. Scott Shetler,

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— Melissa Shetler

Melissa's father and Patty's ex, plays sax, clarinet, mandolin and just about anything else. Sometimes Patty's son and Melissa's half-brother, Travis Light, keeps the groove on bass. It's a recipe for disaster. Somehow they all make it work.

“Being on stage with your parents has its moments,” said Melissa. “It really forces you to submerge yourself in the music.”

“Scotty likes to say ‘The music keeps us together.’ We always knew we had reasons to work out our differences,” said Carpenter. “I feel like we're really lucky ... except for when we aren't.”

It all works on “Come Over,” which began with words and music crafted by Carpenter and Porche, who then recorded rough tracks in Carpenter's living room and sent them off to Scott Shetler. Billed as music producer and arranger on the CD, Shetler fleshed out the songs and found some powerhouse musicians to join in.

The bassist, Tony Garnier, is a long-time musician with Bob Dylan's band. Drummer James Wormworth took time from his gig with Conan O'Brien's band to work on the CD. Also featured are Draa Hobbs and Tony Hecht on guitar, Eugene Uman on piano, Jeremy Gold on

violin, Brian Mitchell on accordion and organ, Brooke Lundy, Melissa Shetler and Jill Gross on backup vocals and a killer horn section of Tim Atherton, Charlie Schneeweis and Grayson Farmer.

The album was mastered by Rob Fraboni at Real Mastering, using RealFeel, a technical innovation which removes the tinny, too-clean feel current digital recording too often has. The result is a warm, clarion-clear sound which fits the songs to a tee.

There is a fundamental honesty to “Come Over,” both in the music, which rings authentic despite meandering through many different styles and genres. Scott Shetler's arrangements are engaging and interesting without seeming overproduced. Carpenter and Melissa Shetler, whose voices are very similar, serve the songs well. If there is a highlight, it may be the song “Solace,” a slow r&b blues which laments lost love, but does so with resolve and strength. Shetler's vocals on it are a knockout.

The result, throughout, is a CD which sounds like the spirit in which it was created — like two old friends laughing, lamenting and celebrating many good years and miles together. It is emotionally rich without being oversentimental; musically rich without being contrived; grown up and serious but still with time to dream and dance. It's consistent right down to the cover — Joan Peters' painting of two coffee mugs side by side speaks of a warm invitation for two friends to spend some time together.

Carpenter said “Come Over” began with a simple question from her husband, Charles Light: “What do you really want to do?”

“Come Over” is her honest answer to that question.

Tickets for Sunday's benefit CD release event and potluck picnic are \$15 in advance, \$20 the day of the show. They can be purchased at www.dfjbmusic.com/cdrelease or by contacting: VCAN at 413-625-6177 or P.O. Box 83, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370.

For more information about “Come Over,” the Dysfunctional Family Jazz Band or Patty Carpenter, visit dfjbmusic.com.

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The band — Carpenter, Shetler and Shetler — will perform this weekend in Guilford.