

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Dakota Dave Hull's 'Better Late Than Never' album highlights the rare guitar-banjo 01GW5EX1NYW0SJ5J3HYPVB8VZY

[DAKOTA DAVE HULL, "LUCKY DOG BOUNCE"]

CATHY WURZER: Oh, I have been waiting for this interview. You're listening to Dakota Dave Hull. He's the legendary Minneapolis musician who cut his teeth in the Minneapolis West Bank folk scene of the 1970s. He's been called a fingerstyle guitar maestro. But with his new album, *Better Late Than Never*, he set down his acoustic guitar to re-introduce audiences to a little known instrument called the guitar banjo. Dakota Dave Hull is with us on Minnesota Now. Do you know how excited I am to talk with you? My gosh, how have you been?

DAKOTA DAVE HULL: Hey. Just doing fine, and thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

CATHY WURZER: Gosh, Dave. Let me ask you about *Better Late Than Never*. You recorded the entire album, which I think is, what? 15 songs on this guitar banjo? Which I've never heard of, but it sounds fantastic. What is it?

DAKOTA DAVE HULL: Well, it's actually been around quite a while-- maybe 150 years. It is basically a guitar neck and a banjo body. It came along as part of the evolution of the banjo. Towards the end of the 19th century through the mid 1920s, there were a lot of changes.

It's interesting to me because I can just pick it up and play it, and it's a different palette of sounds. On the album, there are actually several guitar banjos represented, and the difference between them, too, is really a cool thing.

CATHY WURZER: Can you explain that a little bit more?

DAKOTA DAVE HULL: Talking about sound is kind of different, but if you can envision a banjo-- the head, the area of skin, the drum-like part-- most banjos these days, that's about 11 inches. Some of them are 12. Then you get into some bigger ones. Early Gibsons were 14 inches in diameter. I have one that's 18 inches in diameter.

CATHY WURZER: That's going to sound different, yeah.

DAKOTA DAVE HULL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It's huge, deep sound, and maybe not quite as-- I don't know what the word would be is-- the one you just heard, which was an 11 inch banjo.

CATHY WURZER: OK. I know you composed some original songs for this new album, and we heard one at the beginning. That was the "Lucky Dog Bounce." I love that. We're going to play another one. This is "Long, Long Winter."

[DAKOTA DAVE HULL, "LONG, LONG WINTER"]

That does sound like the long, long winter we've had here, Dave.

DAKOTA DAVE HULL: Well, yeah, and this has more to do with the length of time that we spent isolated. I guess was sort of the inspiration when I titled this tune. Who knew at the beginning of the pandemic that we would be sort of going through this for two plus years?

CATHY Yeah, exactly.

WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE I mean, if they had told us beforehand, I don't know what I would have done. It's better to look back on it to look

HULL: ahead at it, I think.

CATHY You started a series of weekday website concerts during the pandemic, and I think most musicians started to do

WURZER: something like that because, I mean, a lot of your gigs were canceled. Wow.

DAKOTA DAVE Oh, yeah, almost all of them the first year in 2020. I mean, everything was gone. So just in order to stay in the

HULL: game, musicians had to do that. I did three times a week. I'm down to once a week now, and I'm about to take a sabbatical.

I'm going to Japan for a few weeks, so I'm going to wait until I get home from that to do any more of those website concerts, but it's been fun.

CATHY I'm sure you're on mini concert 300 or something.

WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Almost.

HULL:

CATHY Almost? Oh my gosh. Wow. What was the reaction?

WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE 287 I think is where I'll be on this weekend. Who's counting?

HULL:

CATHY What was the reaction?

WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE You know, it was pretty good. There's a sort of a core group of people that seem to show up every time, and then

HULL: other people that show up from time to time. And of course, it's also a nice way to let people know what's going on the new record, of course.

And it started out, too, as a way to ask for tips to help get through this trying time. And that was really good not only for myself, but for most musicians that were doing that.

CATHY So you had a lot of creative time on your hands during the pandemic. So the album, is that the fruits of your

WURZER: downtime, all the work that you've put in?

DAKOTA DAVE That's exactly right. That's exactly right. I had flirted with the guitar banjo before this, recorded a few tunes on it

HULL: and so forth. But this one, I was really able to sort of deep dive into the instrument and come up with just some really-- at least to me-- interesting stuff.

It's got like a 28 page booklet with pictures and some history and pretty extensive notes as well, which also I think some people will find interesting.

CATHY It does not surprise me at all-- because you are a music historian-- that this album is kind of a mix of original
WURZER: compositions and then these cool interpretations of 100-year-old songs. The mix here is pretty amazing.

DAKOTA DAVE Well, thank you. I've always been into traditional music roots, music of all types-- early jazz, folk music, blues,
HULL: early country music, ethnic music. It's all great. For my pleasure listening, I seem to be stuck in the 1920s and 1930s.

You were doing a segment a little earlier on women in music, five women. Well, Sister Rosetta Tharpe is one of my all time favorites. What a wonderful musician and what a guitarist.

CATHY Oh, absolutely could she play a guitar. And that voice?
WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Oh, man.
HULL:

CATHY Wow.
WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Yeah. She was amazing. Yeah, it was good to hear that.
HULL:

CATHY Yeah, thank you. Thank you. I'm glad we picked that. Speaking of other musicians here, with these music
WURZER: segments we have on the program, Dave, I like to ask musicians to share a song or two that inspires them. And not surprising, your inspiration goes back to the early part of the last century. We're going to take a listen right now to a song from 1929. This is Emmett Miller with "Big Bad Bill (Is Sweet William Now)."

[EMMETT MILLER, "BIG BAD BILL (IS SWEET WILLIAM NOW)"]

(SINGING) In the town of Louisville, they got a man they call Big Bad Bill. I want to tell you, he sure was tough and he certainly did strut his stuff. He had folks all scared to death. When he walked by they held their breath.

CATHY OK, you got to tell me, why do you like this version? What about Emmett Miller do you love?
WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Well, I love his singing. He's basically a country singer, but he's being backed up here by basically jazz musicians
HULL: of the time. Eddie Lang on the guitar, my all time favorite guitar player is on there. I think the Dorsey brothers are on that particular recording and a few other very well known people. So it's sort of cross genre, and that always makes my socks roll up and down. I think that's really cool.

CATHY You have another song for us to listen to. This is also from 1929. I can see there's a trend here. This is Charlie
WURZER: Poole with the North Carolina Ramblers on "He Rambled."

[CHARLIE POOLE & THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLERS, "HE RAMBLED"]

(SINGING) My mother raised three grown sons, Buster, Bill, and I. Buster was the black sheep of our little family. Mother tried to break him of his rough and rowdy ways, finally had to give the judge to give him 90 days, and then he rambled.

CATHY Dakota Dave Hull, I'm not sure. Who is Charlie Poole, and what about his songwriting and his playing inspires
WURZER: you?

DAKOTA DAVE Well, less of a songwriter, but an early string band. That tune is interesting because it was also recorded across
HULL: racial lines and cultural lines. Jelly Roll Morton recorded a great version of it, and it's been picked up all over the place.

Poole was really influenced a lot of people through the years, particularly in the old time music tradition-- bluegrass, too, for that matter. Boy, I can't get enough of that.

CATHY Now, before you go, you got to tell folks. You're on your way to Japan for, what? A residency? You're going to be
WURZER: there for several weeks.

DAKOTA DAVE Well, doing some gigs with some friends over there, a couple of guys, Takashi Hamada, who's a wonderful
HULL: ragtime guitarist. I call him the ragtime ninja. And the other guy is Xavier Ohmura and he's a fabulous musician as well. So I'll be doing a series of shows with one or the other of them and a few with all three of us.

CATHY Wow. Well, have a great time, and thanks for joining us today. I really appreciate it.
WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Thank you.
HULL:

CATHY Thank you so much.
WURZER:

DAKOTA DAVE Thank you for having me.
HULL:

CATHY Absolutely. Dakota Dave Hull, Minneapolis-based musician, songwriter. He's fantastic. His new album is *Better*
WURZER: *Late Than Never* on Bandcamp or at his website, dakotadavehull.com. Oh my goodness. I love the type of music he loves, too.