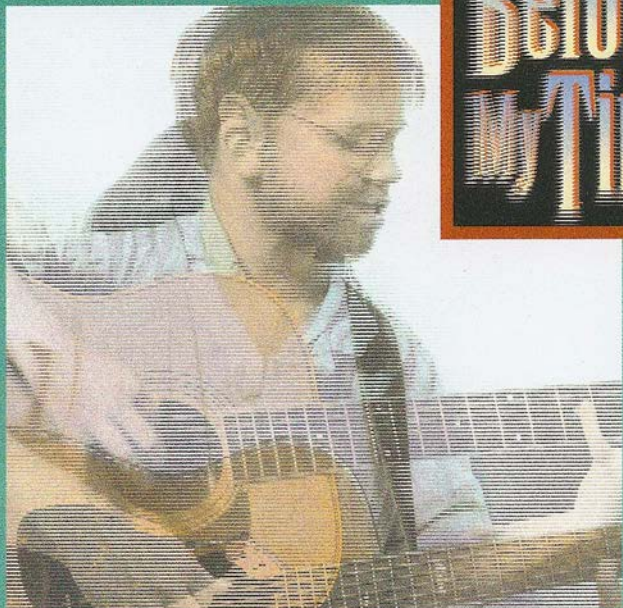
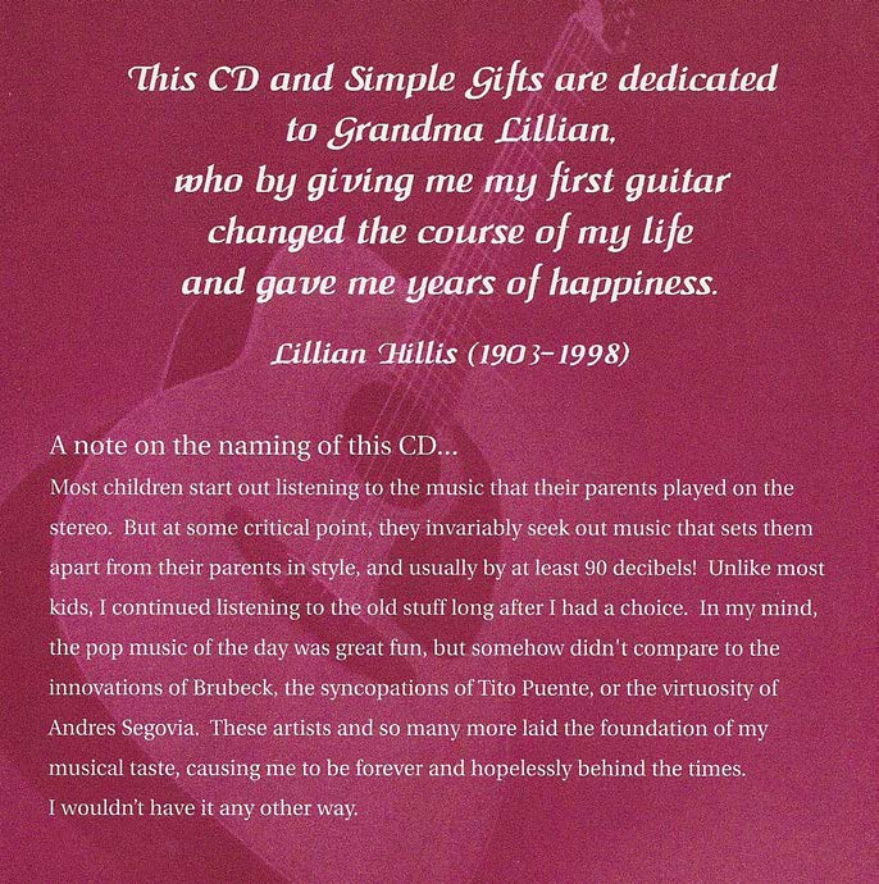


Before  
My Time



Todd Hallawell, Guitar

Soundset



*This CD and Simple Gifts are dedicated  
to Grandma Lillian,  
who by giving me my first guitar  
changed the course of my life  
and gave me years of happiness.*

*Lillian Hillis (1903-1998)*

A note on the naming of this CD...

Most children start out listening to the music that their parents played on the stereo. But at some critical point, they invariably seek out music that sets them apart from their parents in style, and usually by at least 90 decibels! Unlike most kids, I continued listening to the old stuff long after I had a choice. In my mind, the pop music of the day was great fun, but somehow didn't compare to the innovations of Brubeck, the syncopations of Tito Puente, or the virtuosity of Andres Segovia. These artists and so many more laid the foundation of my musical taste, causing me to be forever and hopelessly behind the times.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

**T**here was a time when most of the contestants at the National Fingerstyle Guitar competition in Winfield, Kansas, were amateurs in the truest sense of the word—people who played guitar simply for the love of it, and lived day to day lives outside of the music world. In recent years, as word has gotten around and acoustic guitar has experienced a revitalization, that has been changing, with the winners now more likely to be working professional performers. Even so, still rare are players who come away with top honors on their first try. Todd Hallawell walked up to the stage in 1997 and won "the big one" his first time out. He did it by playing with the verve and consistency that are his trademarks, and his enthusiasm showed a trait that goes back to Winfield's origins—playing for the love of it.

Todd's Winfield-winning entries (*Tico Tico* and *Leola Kay* for the preliminaries, *Brazil* and *Jiffy Jam* in the finals) appear in this collection, and show some of the varietal flavors of the current fingerstyle world, stretching from a modern Jerry Reed tune to a 1930's Latin American pop hit. In his performance of these tunes he demonstrates an innate sense of musicality and variety. It is those qualities—not the mere flash of executing difficult licks and passages—that keep listeners' attention and bring satisfaction after the notes stop flying. Another of Todd's strengths is years of live performance experience, sometimes as a solo artist, and sometimes with saxophonist Jeff Ervin, who collaborates on four of the selections here.

Todd begins with his own *Leola Kay*, a joyous piece he wrote for his wife that flows with the stylistic touch of Leo Kottke at his best. Next is Jerry Reed's swinging *Jiffy Jam*, where Todd uses the sonic qualities of the half-an-octave-lower baritone guitar to great effect. *The Last Steam Engine Train* is an old tune that was unearthed as fingerpicking guitar fare by John Fahey and Leo Kottke in the late 60's, and has been an acoustic jam session staple ever since. Here Todd and long-time compatriot Greg Sarena pour on momentum with a fine duet that meshes the sound of Todd's baritone guitar against Greg's hammering rhythm like gears on a driving wheel. The poignant *Cydney* is another of Todd's original pieces, and deviates from the typical "song form" with ever increasing intensity, showing his formidable compositional skills. *Flat Foot Floogee* is a big band tune from the 40's that comes off as just plain fun for Todd's one man band, with a multi-horn section put together by Jeff Ervin, and some neat solos by flatpicker John Moore.

I was pleased and honored when Todd wanted to do a rendition of one of my previously unrecorded tunes, one that I had carried around on the guitar for years, called *Miss You Like Crazy*. The melancholy feeling that brought this jazz waltz into being comes to life with Todd's fine arrangement featuring intertwining countermelodies between guitar and tenor sax. *Brazil* and *Tico Tico* are two great Latin tunes, with a difficulty rating that warns off all but the most intrepid guitar adventurers. Todd is undaunted, and makes them roll from the strings like butter.

*Ballad I* and *Ballad II* are, for me, the highlight of this collection. They are previously unrecorded works by Russian guitarist and composer Nikita Koshkin, and enjoy a fine debut here through Todd's thoughtful interpretation. They are followed by a lighthearted ensemble rendition of another Koshkin piece, *Bluesman's Tears*, where Jeff conjures up a breezy flute-and-reed section, and plays a fine solo. *Reedology* is arguably the quintessential Jerry Reed tune. Written in the 1970's and presented on a mainly vocal-based album by this twentieth-century master of guitar composition, it remained largely unknown to guitarists until it was transcribed—decoded is probably a better term—a decade later by John Knowles.

When I first heard *Music for a Found Harmonium* it seemed familiar. I was sure I had heard it before, and suspected that it was adapted from Mozart or something of that era. I was surprised to learn that it was a modern piece, written in the early 1980's by British art-rock avatar Simon Jeffes who first recorded it with his eclectic group Penguin Café Orchestra. I was even more surprised to learn from Todd that this tune is one of the current favorites for round-the-campfire jamming at the Winfield festival, which is where he picked it up. Hey, what ever happened to those easy tunes like *Cripple Creek* and *Salty Dog*? Joining Todd here for a round of solo-swapping are Gordon Acri on banjo, John Moore on guitar, and David Peters on mandolin.

Todd even let me play along on a tune, and the set ends with our duet of the Shaker hymn *Simple Gifts*. He was uncompromising as an arranger and producer, exploring myriad possibilities while we worked out parts over a couple of days, but to his credit, the final result still has that most important quality—simplicity.

At the end of listening to the set here you realize—especially if you've ever considered entering a competition yourself—why Todd triumphed at Winfield. It's not about hot licks or fancy flourishes, but more about getting difficult things to flow with ease, and making music that any listener can appreciate. The most respected winners of musical competitions always seem to do it that way.

—Pat Kirtley, February 1999

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**PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE: GORDON ACRI, JEFF ERVIN, ART KERSHAW,  
PAT KIRTLEY**

**TECHNICAL SUPPORT: LEE FURR, ART KERSHAW, RANDY STARACE,  
BOB ZUCKER**

**PROGRAM NOTES: PAT KIRTLEY**

**PROGRAM BOOKLET DESIGN: TIM FISHER, LEANNE KOONCE**

**COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: AL ABRAMS**

**PHOTOS OF YOUNG TODD: RUDI PETSCHKE**

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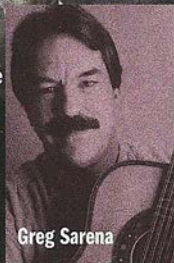
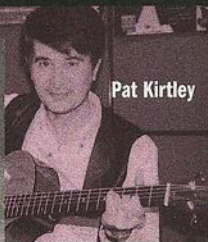
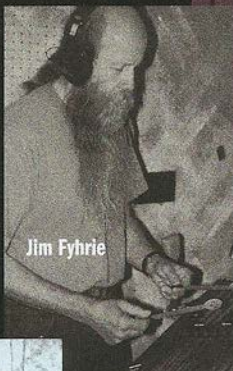
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1) **Leola Kay** - Todd Hallawell

Acoustic Guitar Solo

2) **Jiffy Jam** - Jerry Reed Hubbard

Baritone Guitar, performed with Jeff Ervin  
on saxophone

3) **The Last Steam Engine Train**

- John Fahey

Acoustic and Baritone Guitars, performed  
with Greg Sarena

4) **Cydney** - Todd Hallawell

Acoustic Guitar Solo

5) **Flat Foot Floogee** - Slim Gaillard, Bud  
Green, Slam Stewart

Acoustic Guitar, Jeff Ervin on Saxes, John  
Moore on Flat-pick Guitar

6) **Miss You Like Crazy** - Pat Kirtley

Acoustic Guitar, with Jeff Ervin on Sax

7) **Brazil** - Barroso Ary Evangelista

Acoustic Guitar Solo

8) **Tico tico** - Jose Gomes de Abreu

Acoustic Guitar Solo

9) **Ballad I** - Nikita Koshkin

Acoustic Guitar Solo

10) **Ballad II** - Nikita Koshkin

Acoustic Guitar Solo

11) **Bluesman's Tears** - Nikita Koshkin

Acoustic Guitar with Jeff Ervin, saxes/flute

12) **Reedology** - Jerry Reed Hubbard

Acoustic Guitar Solo

13) **Music for a Found Harmonium**

- Simon Jeffes

Todd Hallawell - Acoustic Guitars,  
Rhythm Guitar, Bass

Gordon Acri - 5-string Banjo

Dave Firestine - Tenor Banjo

Jim Fyhrie - Hammered Dulcimer

John Moore - Flat-pick Guitar

David Peters - Mandolin

14) **Simple Gifts** - Traditional Hymn

Baritone and Acoustic Guitars performed  
with Pat Kirtley