



Beyond the Law: Stuart Tisdale, Guitarist

Interview and photos
by Daniel J. Murphy

Before Elvis, everything was in black and white.

Then came Elvis. Zoom, glorious Technicolor.

– Keith Richards

By all accounts, Stuart Tisdale is among the many whose world was cleaved in two after witnessing a legendary rock and roll performance. For Tisdale, that formative experience was an encounter with the Beatles on television as a child. From that period onward, playing rock and roll with and for friends has remained a constant fixture in his life. As a member of the Elmore Twist Band, Tisdale has found a rewarding outlet for his guitar-playing talents and a opportunity to connect with others. The band also has offered its varied listeners an opportunity to enjoy revisiting the soundtrack of their lives. Tisdale, who otherwise maintains a criminal law practice with his spouse at Tisdale and Davis, P.A., of Portland, spoke with the Maine Bar Journal to discuss his pasttime.

MBJ: Please tell our readers about your interest in music.

ST: Well, I play in a band called the Elmore Twist Band. I play a 6-string electric guitar – lead guitar. Also, after about 20 years, I convinced my bandmates to let me sing a few songs. I also like to play an acoustic guitar and an interesting acoustic instrument called a dobro. The dobro is a kind of gui-

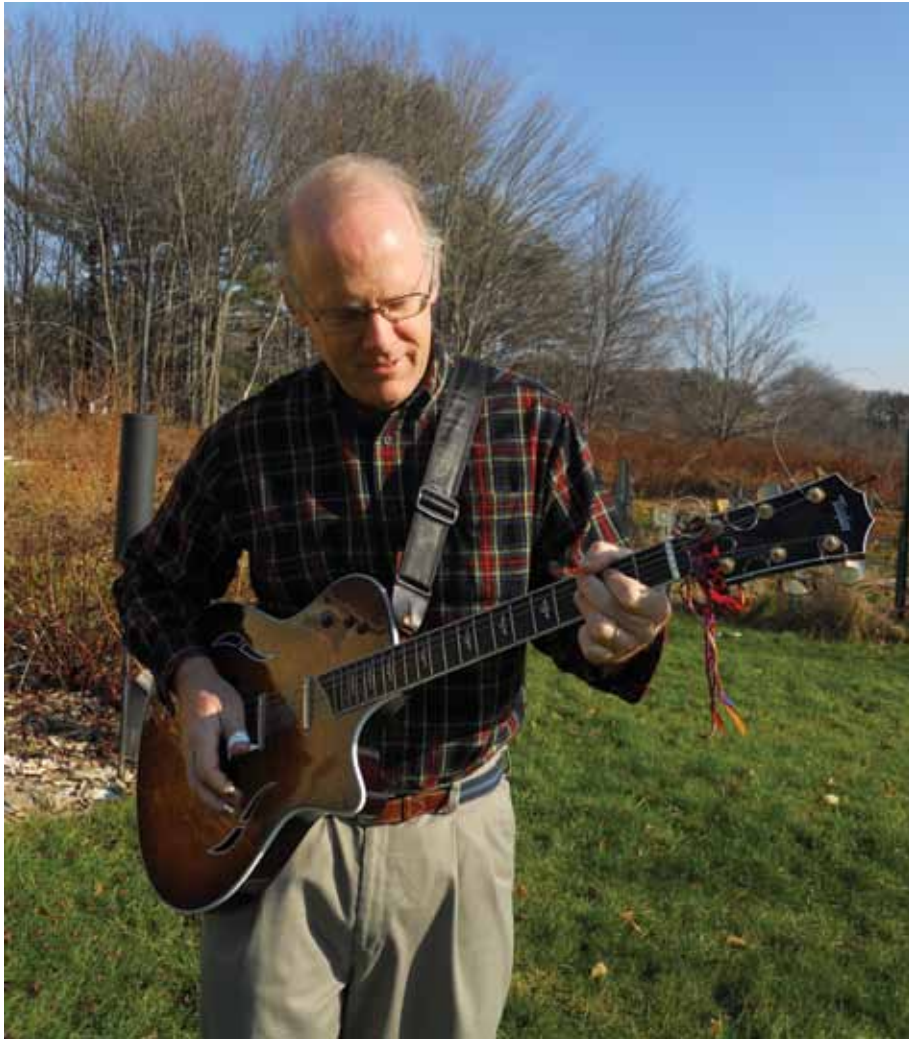
tar with a steel resonator built into the body and strings raised way up off of the fretboard. The strings are too high to play with your fingers so that you have to play them with a steel bar. Also, the dobro is played while lying flat either in your lap or with a special strap that allows you to play it on the horizontal. Technically, it's a kind of steel guitar. It is known as a bluegrass instrument, but I've been trying to adapt it to blues and rock and roll. As far as I know, I'm the

only person that has adapted a dobro to a Steely Dan song.

MBJ: How often does the Elmore Twist Band play out in public?

ST: We play about 40 times a year, if not more. Through the summer, we play regularly every weekend, and often twice a weekend. We have the basic band, which is five guys. Then, there are several combos that split off of that for





different functions – duos and trios and different combinations of trios – but the basic band plays about 40 times a year. We have played a lot up in ski towns, like Sugarloaf, Rangeley, and Bethel, and we play a lot at Boothbay Harbor. We also do a lot of private parties.

MBJ: What kind of music does the band play?

ST: A lot of the music that we grew up with. Now, I guess you would call it “classic” rock and roll – The Rolling Stones, Beatles, J. Geils Band, Allman Brothers, and Eagles. We also play bluesy songs and even play some disco tunes, some country songs, some indie music – a little bit of every period that we grew up with and have grown through. Members in the band have known each other since elementary school and we’ve had the band since I was in grammar school. I was in the 6th grade and the other guys were in the 7th and 8th grade when we began playing to-

gether. We grew up in the West End, in Portland. I was the young kid of the group.

MBJ: How was that first gig together?

ST: I think we piled our equipment on a toboggan and pulled it over to a girl’s house whose parents let her have a party down in the basement. Her father was a lawyer, by the way.

MBJ: And by all accounts it was a successful first gig?

ST: Yes, it was a successful first gig. At least we remember it that way.

MBJ: Do you have any particular shows that were memorable?

ST: This summer, we opened for the Doobie Brothers. That was kind of a kick. We opened for Foreigner about four summers ago. At the Foreigner

show, we played 13 original songs and the people seemed to like them. It was fun to be a bunch of middle-aged guys playing our own material and having the people like it.

MBJ: How did you first become interested in guitar?

ST: Well, I tell you, I saw the Beatles on Ed Sullivan and there was absolutely no question. When I saw how the girls went crazy over the Beatles, it seemed an easy connection: If you wanted girls to like you, then you needed to learn how to play a guitar. When I went to school the next day, I found that the other guys were all thinking the same thing. So it was an easy progression from there to start up a band.

MBJ: Any special influences for your guitar playing?

ST: I would say the blues players like Albert King and Johnny Winter. Johnny Winter has a very fast finger-picking style. He plays more notes per second than anybody. Albert King has the opposite style: a very mellow, expressive style with fewer notes, but he makes the notes speak. I try to go between those two styles.

MBJ: Any interesting anecdotes from your time playing guitar?

ST: There is one story that always makes me chuckle. We have this keyboard player; he’s the newcomer in the band. He’s only been in the band for about 20 years. He didn’t actually grow up with us, but he was known by one of our band members as a summer resident up in Rangeley. Now he’s our keyboard player. He had a life during the 70s and 80s touring with big rock-and-roll bands. So one day he was at O’Hare. He saw some rockers over in the bar and so he went over and sat down. They were dropping names and talking the big time rock and roll talk. It turned out that these guys were in some big national act. Someone from Maine, who happened to be in the bar, came over to their table and says to our keyboard player, “I know you.” Our keyboard player was Chaka Khan’s keyboard player once,

and has played with guys who used to be in Toto, or Steppenwolf, or the Eagles. And he's thinking he's going to be recognized from playing with some of those big-time players, but instead the person said, "I know you. You play in the Elmore Twist Band, don't you?" It may not make anybody else chuckle, but if you realize what a humble operation we are, it's funny.

MBJ: What is it that you love about playing the guitar?

ST: It's the guitar, but it's also about being in a band. What I love is playing when the band is really cooking and there's a room full of people packed shoulder-to-shoulder, jumping around, dancing, yelling, screaming, and having a good time. I think that's great. So it is about the guitar, but it's also just being in the moment with the band. I also like it when we'll be playing in a seedy bar someplace and there will be some characters in there, and then, after an hour or so, one says, "I like the way you play." I like that. I don't know why, but that strikes me as an achievement.

MBJ: Has there been any intersection between your love of music and your law practice?

ST: Well, not really. The law is a serious business and music is not. So I would say they are really very different. There are lawyers that I see at gigs and there are lawyers that I play with. In the criminal defense circle where I practice, there are some who like to talk about or play music. But, mostly law and music are different, as different as heavy and light.

MBJ: What's the best advice that you've ever received?

ST: That's a great question. The best advice that I ever received was: Marry a woman who's smarter than you are. I think that's the best advice I ever received. I have followed it and it's proven to be correct. My wife, Mary, and I have our little law operation together, Tisdale & Davis, P.A. She's the brains of the operation and I fill in every now and then. I'm glad I was smart enough to follow that advice.



Daniel J. Murphy is a shareholder in Bernstein Shur's Litigation Practice Group, where his practice concentrates on commercial and business litigation matters.

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