

# Patriot Ledger

## IN TUNE WITH HIS AUDIENCE

Hull man comfortable in the spotlight as musician, wildlife coordinator



Debee Tlumacki

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QUINCY — Performing is what Stephen Martin does best. At the age of 14, he was Elvis Presley doing *Hound Dog*.

Now at 62, he's at it again – and in between he never left the stage, finding different ways to excite audiences.

Martin, of Hull, was a member of **Orpheus**, a Worcester-based rock band known for its hit *Can't Find The Time To Tell You*, released in 1968.

"I've worked to be the center of attention since early childhood," Martin said. "I think that's what drives any performer."

By day Martin is "Safari Steve," special project coordinator at the New England Wildlife Center in Weymouth. By night – and some weekends – Martin is a music man, part of **Orpheus Reborn**, the reincarnation of his own rock band from more than 30 years ago.

Bass guitarist Eric "the Snake" Gulliksen says their music now has more "social relevance."

"And it's true collaboration. We write songs together, and none of us has an agenda. It's not about the money. It's about the music," Gulliksen said.

The group still performs original hits but doesn't consider itself an "oldies" band.

"Each of us has continued growing musically throughout the decades," Martin said. "We are a contemporary band with deep roots in folk, rock and blues.

"Our motto is: 'We are not your father's Orpheus.'"

Martin grew up in the late '50s and was shaped by the social commentary from the folk song lyrics of the day.

At 15, he led fireside and bus ride sing-alongs as a camp counselor – a year later he wrote his first song (*When I Was Young*), which started his career as a folk singer and songwriter.

Carolynn Anderson, a former neighbor of Martin's, has been an avid follower of Martin's music.

She says his songs explore both the depths of despair and the passion of life, examples of which can be heard in many of his songs, including *Monkey Demon* and *Music Machine*.

"It was as if he was trying to tell us what being a human being was all about," she said. "This is how we all are; this is how we can be," Anderson said.

As Martin seamlessly transitions from musical performer to wildlife handler, audiences are captivated by his deft touch with such diverse fauna as the nine-foot boa constrictor Goliath – or Rosie, a hairy brown tarantula.

"Steve is a talent," says NEWC director Gregory Mertz.

"To us that means he comes with the skills of a performer.

"Performers are very good 'people people,'" Mertz said. "NEWC is about caring for wildlife, but in the long run solutions to environmental problems come from education and knowing how to convince people of your point of view."

Martin says when sharing information with children, it can be hard to keep the audience on track.

"The information itself, no matter how fascinating, is not always enough," he says. "You have to entertain them."

So he developed a character, complete with pith helmet and safari vest, designed to catch and hold the attention of kids.

Martin likes to tell the story about the woman who took her misbehaving donkey to the donkey whisperer.

"The first thing he did was to hit the animal on the head with a two-by-four," Martin said.

"I thought you were going to train the donkey," cried the alarmed owner. "I am," replied the trainer. "You have to get their attention first."

New England Wildlife, says Mertz, introduces many new ideas and concepts, such as the Folk and Blues Jams that Martin hosts every Saturday night at the Center's Catbird Café, where Martin also often appears with Gulliksen as "**Stephen and the Snake**."

Looking back, Martin sees a change in the demeanor of his audience.

"Audiences are a lot less whacked-out than they used to be," he said with a big smile.

"Then, of course, so are we."

For more information, visit [www.stephenbmartin.com](http://www.stephenbmartin.com) and [www.orpheusreborn.com](http://www.orpheusreborn.com).