



Iconic performer brings bluegrass hits to a sold-out Galveston crowd

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Steve Martin, who will be performing with the Steep Canyon Rangers at The 1894 Grand Opera House in Galveston Aug. 27 to a sold-out crowd, was sorry to hear that the historic building took on several feet of water during Hurricane Ike.

As much as he would like to compose a short “Ike” banjo compilation for the audience that night, he said, “Well, that’s not as easy as it sounds.”

That’s understandable, what with his traveling schedule these days.

The Waco-born Martin — actor, comedian, author, playwright, producer, musician — is one of the most diversified performers in the entertainment industry today. His second full-length bluegrass album, “Rare Bird Alert,” released a few short months ago and already has

sold more than 50,000 copies.

Although Martin is well known for his comedy, you won't find him wearing his trademark arrow-through-the-head prop or reviving his "wild and crazy guy" routine. These days, he's into some serious banjo playing. Still, you can expect him to interject some wit and laughter because above all else, Martin is adamant about doing what he knows best — entertaining.

During a recent teleconference, Martin opened up about his life, his music, his career and his fascination with the banjo.

Q: How did you gravitate toward the banjo originally?

A: I was a teenager in Orange County, Calif., during the 1960s, and there was a folk music craze led by the Kingston Trio that was sweeping America and the banjo was a part of that craze. And I heard it and I just loved it. There are a lot of folk music groups that eventually led me to bluegrass music to hear Earl Scruggs play and other great three-finger banjo players, and I started buying any banjo record I could get my hands on.

Q: How does this musical experience compare with the other different things you've done in your career?

A: I rank it right up there at the top. When I was doing standup comedy I was sort of an up-and-comer, and so I had a whole different response to what I was doing. Now, I'm very happy to be doing something that's completely new to me. We do a lot of comedy in the show and this really takes me back. I'm so much more comfortable with it now than I was years ago when I first starting doing it.

Q: You are talented in so many areas. Is there a better human cannonball out there than you?

A: Oh, my gosh, yes! I don't know how this happened. I really don't. I think I only do three things and one is comedy, and that includes, to me, acting; and music and writing. And they're all kind of just all part of one big creative umbrella. When I wrote for television I became essentially two people. You become a creator, you write a joke, and then you become a fixer, meaning an editor. That's what is involved in everything I do, whether it's comic acting or performing on stage, writing a novel, or writing music. You are

creating it and then you are fixing it. So, I look at it as just one big conglomeration that has several tentacles.

Q: How far along in the process are the audiences that you encounter in getting used to you as a musician and not the successful comedian you've been all these years?

A: The audience seems extremely comfortable. They seem to know this music, and if they don't, they seem to be fully aware of what they're in for. There's a lot of drama and excitement in bluegrass music with a lot of tempo changes, a lot of melancholy, and we've worked up a nice show filled with humor that I really enjoy doing.

Q: Is there an all-banjo movie soundtrack in your future?

A: Actually, there is. I've been asked to write music for an animated film, but it won't be out for another couple of years and the Steep Canyon Rangers are going to play on it.

Q: Do you think with your popularity and all the other entertainment fields that you've been involved with that you're in a position to introduce bluegrass to a

whole new crop of fans?

A: It's not what I set out to do, but I think by accident I'm doing it.

Q: Do you think that films were a means to immersing

yourself in a deeper level in your music?

A: Standup getting me into film and film getting me into music was all an accident. This banjo playing moment, whatever it is, I don't know

how long it'll last. I hope it lasts a long time because I love it. It's something that slowly cooked over the last 10 years, but it wasn't intended.

