

## Won't Be Worried Long

by David W Brown on August 21, 2022. © All rights reserved

Beau could really play guitar.

Maybe not like Paul Geremia, but he was the best I ever heard in the decent-sized suburb of the large-sized west coast city I live in.

I met him at a Saturday jam session in the basement of a local church. He was sitting on a wooden folding chair playing some crazy Celtic stuff in DADGAD on an old Martin parlour, fingerpicking like I'd never seen.

Then he turned a couple of the pegs, pulled a bottleneck from his shirt pocket and started playing Charlie Patton.

"God damn", I whistled just as the Reverend walked up beside me.

He laughed and pointed to a big guitar case on the floor. "Wait till he breaks out the twelve string. Has it tuned down five steps, strung with piano wire. Man sounds just like Blind Willie McTell".

Reverend Max was not merely our host, he played a decent blues harp and was not too shabby on mandolin, so he knew whereof he spoke.

I listened to Beau play, marveling at the precision of his slide work.

"Man, no fret rattles or anything", I looked at the Rev. "Can he sing too?"

Max raised his eyebrows. "Says he won't sing unless it's at a funeral".

Now, I'm never going to play like Beau, but I can sing better than decent and am an unabashed ham. So, when the Rev said, "he won't sing", visions of me having an all-star accompanist were dancing in my head.

While I was mentally plotting our set list, the rest of the Rev's words hit me.

"Unless it's for a funeral? What the hell?"

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Max shrugged. "Who am I to question a man's principles?"

Big Terry, Laurie-Ann, Chet, Davey, Norm the Noodler and the other regulars arrived and the jam took its usual shape.

The bluegrass guys always went first, then the folkies and finally us blues freaks.

Beau sat in the back row while the flatpickers and banjo players furiously traded triplets and pentatonic scales. I slid into the chair beside him. "You play way better than those guys".

He shrugged, intently watching a guy we call Rooster try to imitate Tony Rice. "This guy's no slouch".

"Yeah, but that's all he can play", I snorted, "I heard you warming up and you played everything from Turlough O'Carolan to Son House. He only plays fiddle tunes in G major!".

"It's not what you play my friend, it's what you feel when you play it". He picked up the little Martin and joined the circle across from Rooster.

He watched for a few bars before joining in, sliding in behind a banjo solo to play a wicked bottleneck break. Rooster's eyes were big as saucers while Beau made sounds that usually come from a pedal steel.

Just as quickly as he'd joined in, he nodded at Rooster to take a turn and backed him with perfect chord voicings that I didn't know existed.

Folkie time, he sat at the back again, watching like a scientist observing cellular mitosis. Folkies are mainly strummers who might throw in an opening arpeggio, but are primarily focused on chord changes and lyrics.

Third song, he joins the circle while they're playing a traditional folk tune with a C/F/A minor/G progression.

He turns the third peg and puts a capo on the fifth fret and starts playing these amazing minor chord fills, turning the song into something that you might have heard a hundred years ago on a porch in Appalachia.

The folkies were even more impressed than the bluegrass guys and the Rev had to gently remind them it was the blues guys' turn. I assumed that Beau would take the lead and kick us off, and everyone else had the same thought. But he was sitting in the back row retuning the

Martin as if he were alone in his room.

Davey finally took the bull by the horns and started us off with Worried Blues, one of my showcase numbers.

Beau's playing must have inspired me more than I realized, because somehow I was way better than decent, both singing and playing.

It was quite emotional, because I'd always assumed I would never play as well as I sing, but what he'd said hadn't left my mind.

"It's not what you play my friend, it's what you feel when you play it".

Those words made me realize what I'd been missing all my life; I always worried about other's feelings instead of my own.

Max and Davey and even Big Terry were nodding at my playing, like old men in rocking chairs after a big Sunday dinner.

We were coming out of the bridge into the last verse when I heard a voice that reminded me of my father's.

My dad was the best damned singer I've ever known, so I'm not putting it lightly when I say the voice made me feel as if god's gentle hands were tenderly cupping my heart.

You see I'm worried now  
But I won't be worried long  
I'm worried now  
But I know I won't be long  
I'm gonna pack my suitcase  
And lordy, I'll be gone

I closed my eyes and could see an ancient man sitting on a chair, face turned heavenward, singing while his loving family watched.

The notes started flowing from my guitar as if Beau was somehow playing through me and I soloed as I'd always dreamed of.

We finished the song and everyone stood without speaking, still dazed from a beautiful, but eerie experience.

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Rooster finally broke the silence.

“Man, he could really sing”, he said softly.

I followed his eyes to the chairs in the back where Beau sat, eyes closed, face tilted towards the ceiling, a peaceful smile on his lips.

Author's notes:

Paul Geremia is a brilliant guitarist whose career was cut short by a stroke

DADGAD is an 'open' tuning for guitar, most often used by the Irish

Charlie Patton was one of the earliest blues artists/stars

Blind Willie McTell brought the 12 string to prominence and Dylan wrote an eponymous song in his honour

Tony Rice was a bluegrass genius who died too early from addiction related health issues

O'Carolyn was a blind harpist and prolific composer of Irish music

Son House was a brilliant blues artist who played and sang with an incredible intensity

Lyrics to Worried Blues by Nehemia Skip James.