

# Why Grain Thief is Stealing the Show!

## Why Grain Thief is Stealing the Show!

by Susan Marquez

The formation of a band is sometimes very exact, and other times is quite organic. Such is the case with Grain Thief, a five-piece string band based in Boston, Massachusetts. At the band's core is Patrick Mulroy (guitar/vocals). Grain Thief was the man he used for his solo project from 2011 to 2014 when he toured the East Coast after recording two EPs and moving back to Boston from Washington, DC. While living in Washington, Mulroy played in a heavy metal jam band called Thundertyts.

In Boston, he continued to use the name Grain Thief, bringing in a revolving group of musicians, including drummers, guitarists, and bass players. Tom Farrell joined the band early on. Mulroy and Farrell met in 2008. He became a regular, playing bass guitar while Mulroy played his newly purchased blonde Telecaster®.

Zach Meyer and Alex Barstow were reluctant members at first. Meyer was a saxophonist and was prodded to join the band on mandolin. Barstow was a trained classical violinist and had also played drums in a punk band. Meyer convinced him to jam on some old-time tunes. Meyer grew up in the old-time fiddle community in Washington State. Rounding out the band is Mike Harmon, who is a recording engineer. He plays bass and adds a third vocal harmony to the band.



The band has been together in its current formation for five years. “Playing in this band has been like an act of discovery,” laughs Barstow. Mulroy agrees. “We learn from each other all the time. We learn about music theory and to do that, you have to know what you’re doing. These guys certainly know what they are doing. There are dynamics in a group that you can’t get from academia.”

Grain Thief’s first EP, *Animal*, was recorded and released in 2015. That record showcases the band’s folk, bluegrass, and old-time music.

*“It’s very rootsy, with country and bluegrass sound with a modern lyrical content,”* says Mulroy, who describes Grain Thief as not a bluegrass band, but a “bluegrass music band.”





The follow-up to their first EP was *Stardust Lounge*. “That one was somewhat of a departure,” says Mulroy, who showed his songwriting skills on most of the songs. The project began in April 2016 but took a year and a half to complete. The album is filled with songs of loss and regret, and the struggles of the everyday working man, but with a twist. The arrangements in *Stardust Lounge* are a departure from *Animal*, keeping their interpretation of Americana music open-ended. Named after a cheap hotel in Lake Tahoe, the album captures the band’s take on Americana, while still honoring their New England roots. The band has traveled around the Northeast, including Western Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and

Connecticut. They've played many festivals, including Grey Fox Bluegrass, Ossipee Valley Music Festival, Podunk Bluegrass, and Thomas Point – 95 dates in all last year. When interviewed at the Folk Alliance Festival in New Orleans in January, the guys were looking forward to a busy 2020 festival season, as they prepared to release new music. That has changed, of course, due to the COVID19 pandemic, however, the new music was still released.

A new single was released in late January. *Pedal Down* was a preview to the LP, *Gasoline*, the album the group was working on in March. The peppy song was recorded and filmed in an attic in Brighton, Massachusetts. The album, released in July, was recorded over two weekends at an Airbnb. "The highlight for me was getting into a space where we were isolated from the rest of the world," says Barstow. The album was cut with all five standing in a circle.

*"I like that we did away with all the extra additives that typically goes into recording an album," says Farrell. "It was just us and Dan Bui (Twisted Pine), who engineered the album. One unusual aspect of the album is the addition of a Cajun accordion, played by Meyer. "I have been wanting to play accordion on one of our albums, and they kept telling me no," he says. "But I kept practicing and they finally told me yes!"*

<https://youtu.be/zzX6qMR54Gk>

Locals in the Somerville, Massachusetts area have enjoyed hearing the band live each Wednesday at the Burren pub. "We began a residency there in 2017 to entertain the Wednesday crowds," Mulroy says. "That has lasted longer than we ever expected."

The band members have other jobs besides the work they do in Grain Thief. Mulroy is a contractor, Harmon owns a recording studio, Meyer is a mechanical engineer and Barstow is a

software engineer.