

penchant for bluegrass music, whilst being involved in a variety of other projects.

The sessions to record the ten original songs for this album took place over a number of years with altering line-ups, depending on availability and has finally come to fruition this Summer with the release of *The Blue Blue Grass of Home*.

Now available through all the usual digital outlets, The Grace Reunion Band hope you enjoy listening to the music as much as they enjoyed playing it!



## SWEET OLIVE STRING BAND

While New Orleans will never be as famous for its acoustic music scene as it is for jazz, funk and R&B, Sweet Olive String Band's auspicious debut brings one of its quieter, longstanding titans to the forefront.

Though Pat Flory has resided in the Crescent City since the late 70's and has made his presence felt with various contributions, surprisingly these bluegrass-tinged tracks (read: no banjo) represent his first studio recording ever.

Flory wrote the lion's share of songs with five originals that fit well within the classic bluegrass/old-time country idiom without being redundant or formulaic.

As a vocalist, he can sound hearty like



bandmate Mike Kerwin but also warble that high lonesome sound, such as on "My Louisiana Home." On Kerwin's "Long Lonesome Road," Flory adds a touch of high harmony reminiscent of the legendary country brother duets of the '30s and '40s, something Sweet Olive should leverage more of.

The quartet's playing is extremely accomplished, especially given Flory and Kerwin's splendid flatpicking and Forsyth's gorgeous rides. Two instrumentals ensure that its Louisiana identity stays intact; the lazy, strolling jazz standard "Tin Roof Blues" and the lolling Cajun waltz "Gabrielle." With its clean, crisp mix and understated soulfulness, Sweet Olive's cruise ends too soon, 10 tracks clocking in at 26 minutes. Still, it's just enough to leave you wanting more.

Dan Wilging

## SERENE GREEN TO WHOM IT PERTAINS

It's been a whirlwind summer for the eastern Pennsylvania based quartet Serene Green. The long-running project of guitarist Michael Johnson and mandolin picker Quentin Fisher evolved to its current lineup about two years ago, solidifying as a strictly bluegrass string band with the addition of bassist Shane McGeehan and banjo man Steve Leonard. Much of those two years have been spent honing their chops, playing — mostly covers of bluegrass classics — at small local pubs and gatherings.

That all changed in May when they followed a critically acclaimed set at their first major festival, the Susquehanna Breakdown, with a whirlwind assault on DelFest. The band was not on the bill at Del McCoury's hootenanny, but nobody left the mountains of Cumberland, Maryland not having been treated to their picking. Roaming the festival grounds through the night, Serene Green visited more camp fires than Smoky Bear. Anywhere folks stopped to gather, they were bound to pop up to pick, a tactic that generated tremendous buzz. From there it was off to Colorado for a spot in the prestigious Telluride Bluegrass Festival's band competition and some smaller festival appearances.

Now comes the release of the band's first studio recording, "To Whom It Pertains," a strong 10-song collection of originals that puts their own stamp on bluegrass music. It's got a lot of classic bluegrass themes. There's a whiskey song, a brush with the law song (that would be right at home in a bluegrass gospel set), and a cheating woman song. They sing of lost loves, and in the clever, Fisher-penned "World's Most Interesting Man," of being down on your

luck. But the music is never cliché.

The first track, "Dusty Pictures," starts abruptly with McGeehan's vocals kicking it off. The first time you hear it, you are taken aback, not sure if the song really starts like that or if you somehow skipped the intro. It's not the last time you will want to rewind. This is a CD filled with potential earworms, like "Don't Let Me Fall," a rollicking tale of two minor brushes Johnson has had with the law, which breaks into a gospel plea for redemption. With three-part harmony, it can be hard to move on to the next song without re-listening.

There is a strong balance here between the more traditional sounding numbers, mostly written by McGeehan, and the offerings of Johnson and Fisher, which tend towards more cleverly humorous lyrics and a quicker pace. As a band they shift with ease from one style to another, sharing the lead and harmony duties among McGeehan, Johnson, and Fisher. The balanced strength of all three vocalists is most evident when they combine on three-part harmony, especially in McGeehan's waltz "Will It Rain As Hard."

Leonard, known for his lightning quick picking, shines throughout the CD. He gets to really show off his skills in the instrumental numbers, especially on CD closer "Misery Breakdown," one of two songs he wrote in the album. Leonard starts "Misery" with the banjo in high gear and takes off, with the rest of the band ably keeping pace throughout, Johnson and Fisher matching Leonard lick for lick.

It is hard to believe these guys are just in their early 20s. These kids are good. They play with a polish that usually takes a decade or more to attain. It will be interesting to hear their songs evolve as years pass and they experience a little more life, a little more heartache, and maybe a few more brushes with the law.

Available through their web site at [www.serenegreenbluegrass.com](http://www.serenegreenbluegrass.com)

Chris A Courgen

