



**FINGER-PICKING, HARMONIZING FOLK-BLUES SUPERGROUP
ARRIVES WITH A DEBUT ALBUM FULL OF BRAND-NEW SONGS
AND VIBRANT SPINS ON VINTAGE CLASSICS**

Rich DelGrosso, Mary Flower and Martin Grosswendt pool their respective masteries of blues, folk, country and a bevy of acoustic instruments, having themselves a time as they skip across decades of roots songs and styles...

Mandolinist **Rich DelGrosso**, Guitarist **Mary Flower** and multi-instrumentalist **Martin Grosswendt** have earned steady streams of praise for their outstanding string skills. Combined, these three have earned nine Blues Music Award nominations and enjoyed rave press reviews and top festival slots all over the world. And they do strum, pick and bow up a storm on their debut album together as the **Ragpicker String Band** — but it's their tight trio harmonies that especially dazzle. The acoustic dream team summons the spirits of everyone from the Mississippi Sheiks and Blind Boy Fuller to Jim Kweskin and R. Crumb as their voices and fingers fly through the mists back to the golden prewar age of folk-blues.

Their self-titled album comes out August 14, 2015 on Memphis label Yellow Dog Records, home to three previous Mary Flower studio albums.

Classics by the likes of the Mississippi Sheiks, Sleepy John Estes and Blind Willie Johnson — combined with new originals by Flower and DelGrosso — allow this virtuosically fearsome threesome to leaven their serious instrumental and vocal chops with cheeky social satire and mischievous humor. Just as Kweskin and Crumb filtered the songs and sounds of their prewar folk-blues heroes through their own modern sensibilities and considerable personalities, so do the Ragpicker String Band.

Jump from a fabulously fretted, sublimely sung trip to the past like *Trimmed and Burning* to a laughing lament of modern times like *Google Blues* and you'll find out what an uncommonly fine stew of traditional and contemporary ingredients they've cooked up. They even season it with a delectable dose of jazz via a conspicuously piano-less romp through Thelonious Monk's standard *Blue Monk*.

Elsewhere, they revive Sleepy John Estes with a trio of songs by the Tennessee country-blues icon: *Milk Cow Blues*, *Clean Up at Home* and *Black Mattie*. Another old country-blues favorite, the Mississippi Sheiks' *Lonely One in This Town*, gets a fresh Ragpicker rendition, too, accompanied by Mary's *Bruno's Dream*, Rich's *Street Doctor Blues* and other newly minted songs. The album — tracked and mixed by Stuart Sullivan at Wire Recording in Austin, Texas — was helmed by prolific and highly prized saxophonist/arranger/producer Mark "Kaz" Kazanoff.

"*Bruno's Dream* started as Mary's slide piece and we let it blossom in Kaz's kitchen as his parakeet Bruno sang along," laughs DelGrosso. As for the willful fusion of contemporary themes and throwback string-band sounds to be found on the album, he says, "We love the diversity, giving the old tunes a new taste but keeping them connected to their roots."

Mark Hoffman, the co-author of *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf*, called DelGrosso's mandolin mastery "the best since Yank," and Yank Rachell devotees everywhere agree. Rich manhandles both the mandolin and mandola on this new album. Mary, a two-time finalist at the National Fingerpicking Guitar Championship, shines brightly on guitar and lap steel here. And Martin ("One of the best fingerpickers I ever heard play" —*David Bromberg*) shows how it's done on the fiddle, mandolin and guitar (with and without the bottleneck slide).

Add together what all three of these prodigiously talented musicians bring to the table and you know you're in for a string exhibition of the highest order. Shimmering vocal harmonies and irrepressible humor seal the deal, making this new venture a "side project" worthy of the front-and-center spotlight — something Rich, Mary and Martin are each accustomed to as a solo artist, and amble into arm-in-arm on their tremendously enjoyable debut as the Ragpicker String Band.

"I really wanted people to hear just the three of us and what we can bring to a live show," says DelGrosso. "Funny...Kaz, kept saying, 'We're gonna need a rhythm section.' But after he heard the rhythms we put down, he changed his mind!"

Rich, Mary and Martin have worked together in several combinations over the years. Now, finally and officially joining forces as the Ragpicker String Band, they'll be appearing at folk festivals, music halls and acoustic-music workshops in 2015 and beyond.

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The Ragpicker String Band are:

Rich DelGrosso

lead and harmony vocals,
mandolin and resonator
mandolin, mandola, dobro

Mary Flower

lead and harmony vocals,
fingerpicked and lap slide
guitar

Martin Grosswendt

lead and harmony vocals,
fingerpicked and
bottleneck slide guitar,
fiddle, mandolin

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Publicity: Mike Powers, Yellow Dog Records publicity@yellowdogrecords.com

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1910 MADISON AVE #671 MEMPHIS, TN 38104 PHONE: (901) 452-4087 FAX: (901) 328-5632