

Headline: De Lone At Last!
Sub: Master Music Man Captures Milley Award

by
Mike Russell

It's music to the ears of Mill Valley. This year's Milley Award for Creative Achievement in the Musical Arts goes to local maestro and impresario Mr. Austin de Lone -- accomplished musician, songwriter, singer, composer, performer, producer, master of ceremonies, loving family man, and humble community servant. Called "the working man's musician," by his wife Lesley, de Lone has been a Mill Valley resident for over 35 years. All the while he has been a hard working and prolific artist, tirelessly writing, producing and performing his music -- locally, nationally and internationally. Millions worldwide have enjoyed his shows, recordings and productions, and it's with deep appreciation that the Milley is handed to Maestro de Lone from a community that has so greatly benefited from his presence and energy.

De Lone's accomplishments and creativity have come to define the renowned "artistic village atmosphere" of Mill Valley. When he isn't heard rehearsing at home in his Sycamore Park neighborhood, the music man is either somewhere in the greater Bay Area, or somewhere around the world. He has tirelessly toured, sang, and played keyboards, guitars, accordions and more, in his countless shows and sessions with many popular artists and bands, including Elvis Costello, Bonnie Raitt, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Nick Lowe, Clarence Clemens, and more. Even sax-strutting President Bill Clinton had the honor of jamming along with Austin, at the Presidential Blue Jean Bash a few years back in Washington D.C.

De Lone not only puts on great shows -- he knows how to run them. For over a decade he served as the Musical Director of the Bay Area Music Awards -- "the Bammies" -- where he handled the enormous task of coordinating all the many live acts for the prestigious show. And for many years, all of Mill Valley has enjoyed Austin's music rolling by at the Memorial Day Parades. There, he performs with the Jug Band "on the big truck", which drops him off at the Community Center, where de Lone keeps Mill Valley dancing to a day on the green. Austin has performed at his children's school fundraising events and headed up the music scene at the annual downtown Mill Valley "Famous For Our Look" block parties, in addition to performing at the San Rafael Chalkpainting Festival, the Great American Blues & BBQ Festival, the San Francisco Blues Festival, the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, and many, many more.

If the heart and soul of the Mill Valley music scene is the legendary Sweetwater Saloon, then Austin de Lone stands center stage as its primary musical force. He has performed there, by far, more times than any other artist or band. De Lone rocked the house when the club first opened, and he played the last song ever on its stage, at the recently closed Throckmorton Avenue location. Plenty of the greats have jammed with Mr. de Lone at the revered venue, in addition to the above-mentioned: Sammy Hagar, Jerry Garcia, Robert Cray, John Lee Hooker, Ry Cooder, Commander Cody, Albert Collins, Charles Brown, Carla Thomas, Eggs Over Easy, and The Moonlighters... just to name a few.

Austin de Lone hasn't only graced the Sweetwater stage with the super-stars.

He's also there to help the up-and-comers. For over seven years, he has served as Master of Ceremonies for the Sweetwater's Open Mic Night, where he helps and encourages new performers, songwriters, and amateur and semi-professional musicians of all walks, to share their musical joys, talents and hopes with others. Austin often backs them up musically or with vocals, always offering tips and fun-loving words of encouragement and enthusiasm. All of Mill Valley will miss the old Sweetwater -- but fret thee not! De Lone's tunes will rise to new heights, on a new Sweetwater stage, when the club re-opens at its new Miller Avenue location.

He also just recently performed the last song ever at another legendary location: Village Music. Here, de Lone serenaded the sad departure of the record store with his original song honoring the late great 45 vinyl discs, entitled, "Little Bitty Record with a Great Big Hole."

When he's not on stage, de Lone spends considerable time in the recording studio. He has produced or performed on many records with other artists and bands, both here and abroad. He currently has two of his own solo CDs in release: "De Lone At Last", and "Soul Blues".

The music man has made his 'hood an especially magical place for his neighbors, as he rehearses from his studio in the front of the house. Next door neighbor Cullynn Vaeth shares, "On any given day, you can hear Audie's piano and his amazing voice, working out new songs, music for an upcoming gig, or something he's recording. The day we moved in seventeen years ago, we knew we were lucky. It's been magic."

Austin is the father of a son afflicted with a rare and severe developmental disorder known as Prader-Willi Syndrome. It is no small challenge, to say the very least, for de Lone and his wife Lesley to raise their children, young Richard (9) and their daughter Caroline (15), in these hectic and unstable times. But like her father, teen Caroline shares the passion and talent for music and the performing arts, having appeared in many local theatrical productions.

People say Mill Valley has changed, but some things remain the same: despite any challenge, Austin de Lone's music continues day and night, coming from the laughter, the tears, the family and the friendships, and his love of music and life.

How does the music man summarize his current station in the musical life? He offers, "Though I still get a thrill from traveling around the country and the world, playing music and making new friends, the biggest thrill of all is coming back to Mill Valley to my family and my home, my inspiration and my happiness." For Austin de Lone, life is a song, and Mill Valley celebrates and loves him as one its own, and humbly thanks him for so many years of his passion for life, and his music, wonderful music.

Mike Russell is a screenwriter and filmmaker living in Mill Valley.

"Arts in Mind" is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education.