

# The Graham Guitar Journey USA: July 2019 – September 2022

**USA: Up and down the West Coast, then across to Pennsylvania and New England and then back home to old England** (16 plays)

## **CALIFORNIA:**

**Pacific Grove** with Rick Chelew

**Santa Cruz** with Tommy Emmanuel (on tour from Australia)

**An old growth coastal redwood grove** with Mark Woyshner

**Redwood Valley** with Alex de Grassi

**Yreka** with David Nigel Lloyd (who managed the Graham Guitar's journeys)

## **OREGON:**

**Applegate Valley** with Kevin Carr

## **CALIFORNIA:**

**Albany** with Danny Carnahan

**Santa Cruz** with William Coulter

**Bakersfield** with Dave Ogden.

**PENNSYLVANIA: Pittsburgh** with Liz McBride.

**VERMONT: West Townshend** with Hungrytown (Rebecca Hall and Ken Anderson).

**MASSACHUSETTS: Northampton** with Jonathan Stevens.

**RHODE ISLAND: Bristol** with Allysen Callery.

**NEW YORK: Long Island City** with Gerry "Spooky Ghost" Leonard.

**PENNSYLVANIA: Sellersville** with Rolly Brown; **Doylestown** with Jay Ansill

## **UK:**

**Black Dyke Mills Heritage Venue in Queensbury, West Yorkshire:** Chris Brain.

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The Graham Guitar is named for English guitarist/songwriter/painter **Graham Coxon**, founding member of Blur. The guitar crossed the Atlantic under his care in July 2019 when he performed at the Smell, the egalitarian, if not ironically named, arts organisation in Los Angeles, city of sun, surf, and smog.

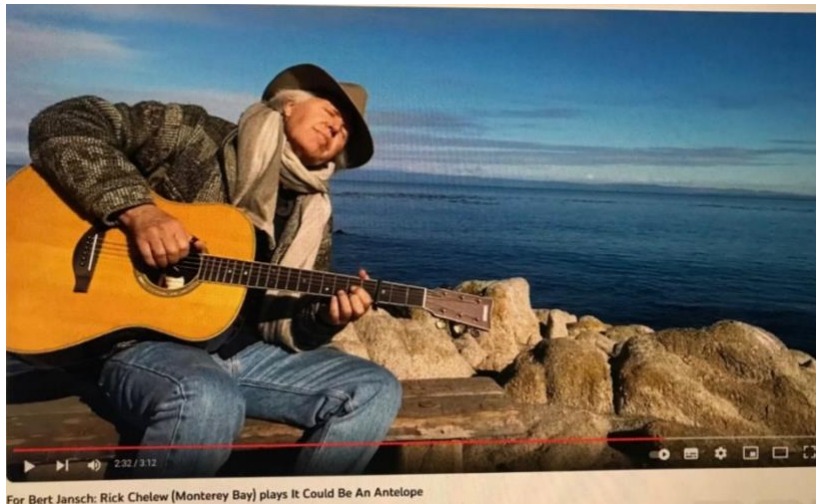
"I sit and play a Bert song or two every day," says Graham, "as part of my practice and for the sheer enjoyment of playing them. I like how the songs make my fingers move and I am always surprised at the sound coming from my guitar. I will never stop learning from Bert Jansch. His records have proved to be a great gift to everyone, and for me they are also an education and a well of inspiration."



The Graham Guitar is one of five BJF Yamaha LL TransAcoustic guitars – the latest in the LL Series that Bert favoured for performance and recording in his later years. These special guitars passed from artist to artist around the world from 2018 to October 2023, each person playing a song for Bert on the guitar he would have loved and saying how much he meant to their musical journey. From 2019 to 2022, the Graham Guitar would travel from sea to shining sea, from mountains to desert, and through wildfires, blizzards and, of course, a pandemic.

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## **Rick Chelew – Pacific Grove, California**



From Los Angeles, Graham Coxon shipped the Graham Guitar 325 miles north to Pacific Grove on the Monterey Peninsula where Rick Chelew awaited it. Rick and his Grammy Award-winning brother, the late John Chelew, had not only known Bert Jansch very well, they had also produced Bert's 14th album, *Heartbreak*, in Los Angeles in 1981. A

deluxe edition released in 2012 included a live disc recorded at McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica. In November 2019, Rick videoed himself playing 'It Could Be an Antelope', his own instrumental composition, on a rocky Monterey Peninsula beach near his home.

## **Tommy Emanuel – Santa Cruz**

Rick then took the guitar to Santa Cruz to video Tommy Emmanuel with the Graham Guitar backstage at the Rio Theater. On tour from Australia, Tommy recalled how in the 1970s he had had the honour of opening for Bert at the Kirk in Sydney. Tommy said: "It would be really good if this guitar got into the hands of some wonderful players round the world," as he launched into his brisk composition, 'Halfway Home'.



## **Mark Woysner – An unnamed old growth coastal redwood grove**

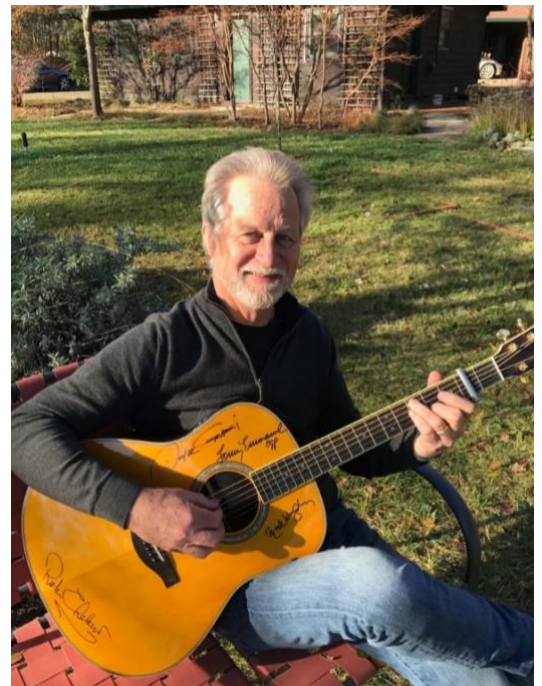


From Santa Cruz, hydrologist / guitarist Mark Woysner drove the Graham 220 miles north to the coastal hamlet of Mendocino where Alex de Grassi was performing in early December. On his way, Mark stopped in at one of his favourite old-growth Redwood groves to video himself playing Bert's 'Bird Song'.

## **Alex De Grassi – Redwood Valley**

Although Alex de Grassi did perform with the Graham Guitar in Mendocino, he videoed 'McCormick', his Song for Bert, in his studio an hour away in Redwood Valley.

'McCormick' was named for folk guitarist John McCormick who was a great fan of Bert Jansch and John Renbourn. The connection between de Grassi and Jansch runs even deeper. As a teenager, Alex de Grassi taught himself to play guitar by the painstaking needle-drop method, learning many Bert Jansch pieces. With his fame spreading in the early 80s, Alex was more than happy to pick Bert up at San Francisco Airport, show him around town, and drive him to his gig at the Great American Music Hall.



## David Nigel Lloyd – Yreka

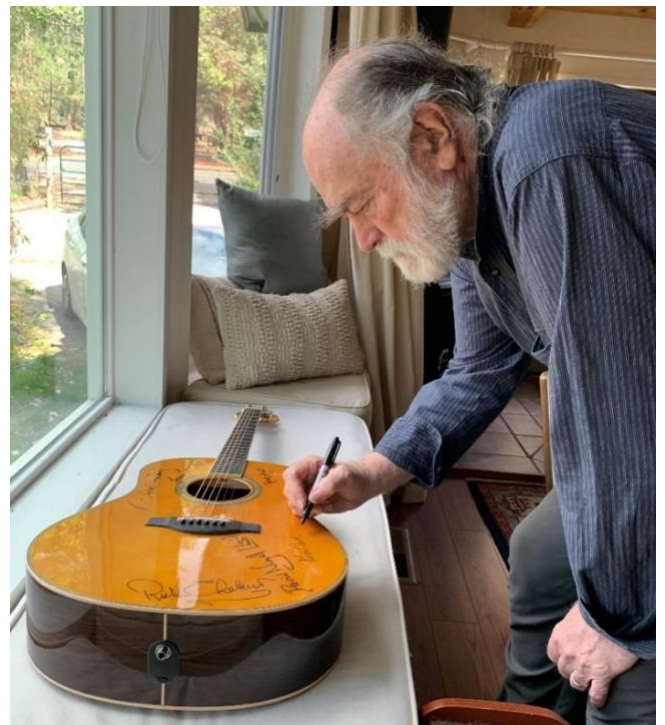
David Nigel Lloyd (DNL) and the Graham Guitar connected shortly after midnight on Christmas Eve, 2019. It was snowing. On January 4th, the Graham Guitar sat in at the Saturday morning jam session at Zephyr's Books and Coffee in Yreka. When it was time for DNL's obligatory guitar solo, he experienced the Yamaha LL Surprise Effect for himself. Every note could be heard clearly in the back of the noisy room. "Good thing it was a good solo," he said to himself. For his video for Bert, artist Gita Lloyd interviewed her husband as he drove past the site of California's most beloved palindrome, Yreka Bakery. At home, David Nigel Lloyd videoed himself performing his song 'The Fall of Jack O'Lantern' for Bert.



Before the Graham could continue north, the Graham Guitar and the other four traveling guitars were to shelter in place wherever in the world they happened to be. The great COVID pandemic lockdown had begun. David Nigel Lloyd took the opportunity to record an album on the Graham Guitar as a tribute to Bert's *Rosemary Lane*. The album was a response, 50 years after the fact, to *Rosemary Lane*. Thus, it is entitled *Of Service in Rosemary Lane*.

## Kevin Carr – Applegate Valley, Oregon

Cautiously masked and out in the open, DNL and Kevin Carr met in the bustling metropolis of Medford, Oregon, in June 2020. The Graham Guitar was at last on the move again. He accompanied Kevin back home to the winery-rich Applegate Valley twenty miles away. "I loved Pentangle," Kevin wrote. "The drive, majesty and mystery in Bert's music always took me to somewhere deep and revivifying." Kevin played both guitar and fiddle, he chose 'Madame, I'm a Darlin', a song which he suspects he sang as a 20-year-old, busking in Europe and which he may have first heard from the great Dublin singer and collector Frank Harte. It is "the kind of song Bert would have done a great job with."



Radio programmer Laurel Reynolds would play the music of Bert Jansch, Pentangle, Kevin Carr, and David Nigel Lloyd on her twice-monthly folk music show on Jefferson Public Radio. With a potential listenership over a million strong, Laurel diligently announced the presence of the Graham Guitar and the purpose of the Around the World in 80 Plays program until, at last, the Graham Guitar left Jefferson and returned to central California with Danny Carnahan.

## **Danny Carnahan – Albany, California**

Kevin Carr and Danny Carnahan are members of the eminently popular Wake the Dead, “the world’s first Celtic Grateful Dead jam band.” Like Kevin Carr, Danny was at the forefront of the California Celtic Revival of the mid -1970s.

With several albums on Flying Fish and Kicking Mule, contributing musicians on Danny’s albums include Richard Thompson and Martin Simpson. Among Danny’s many nonfiction articles for *Acoustic Guitar Magazine*, is one he wrote about “Around the World in 80 Plays – the Bert Jansch Guitar project.”

A long-time resident of Albany on the east shore of San Francisco Bay, Danny Carnahan’s two-tune Song for Bert consists of ‘the Close Call’, a march, and ‘Loughrask’, a ballad he began in the West of Ireland inspired by the long ballads he first heard played by Pentangle. “I’ve loved the music of Bert Jansch for 50 years,” he said.

As if the Pandemic was not enough, to contend with, in early August 2021, small coastal communities and coastal redwood groves north of Santa Cruz and south of San Francisco had been engulfed in what was to be known as Lightning Complex Fires. Over 86,000 acres burned as the fires raged into late September. Nearly 15,000 structures were destroyed. The Graham Guitar disappeared. A year passed.



## William Coulter – Santa Cruz

The Graham Guitar had been sent to William Coulter in Santa Cruz. After the fires had been contained, the spring rains had then caused massive mudslides throughout the devastated areas. Recovery was still underway. William, we would learn, had lost his house and everything in it. However, the Graham had been elsewhere and William had even submitted his Song for Bert, a Welsh tune called 'Lilly in the Blackthorn Bush'. With characteristic humility William introduced it simply as a lament for Bert's passing. "Bert Jansch was the first musician I heard," said Coulter, "who was making original arrangements of traditional music. I was very inspired by this ... and I wanted to follow in his footsteps."



## Dave Ogden – Bakersfield



Dave Ogden's traditional roots are deep. Both his grandfather and great great grandfather were Virginia fiddle players. "I've always gravitated towards traditional music," he said. "One of the record stores in my hometown of Spokane, Washington, carried lots of English folk LPs," he continued. "I started with Bert's work in Pentangle; then his solo albums." Bakersfield has a reputation as a hot and dusty oil town. Hardscrabble Oklahoma Dust Bowl refugees had built a network of

honky tonks in the suburb of Oildale where the Bakersfield Sound, a new twangier variety of country music developed.

Dave took the Graham Guitar sightseeing over the Tehachapis to Red Rock Canyon State Park in the Mojave Desert. For his Song for Bert, Dave chose the Irish song 'The Flower of Magherally'. Dave Ogden is also a dealer of high-end acoustic guitars. "I'm jazzed," he said, "to play... a Yamaha LL TransAcoustic model. It's a very nice sounding guitar. It's got extensive electronics and a very natural articulate balanced sound to it when plugged in. I can see why Bert liked it."

During the two years between January 2020 and December 2021, confronted by fire and pestilence, the Graham Guitar had logged in with only five guitarists. Compared with four guitarists in the last two months of 2019, the guitar would have to gain speed and momentum if it was to be returned, as planned, to the Bert Jansch Foundation in London by end of 2022. Dave Ogden, as it happened, had business to attend in Nashville, Tennessee. The Graham Guitar accompanied him on this 2,000-mile drive east. Dave then shipped Graham to Liz McBride, a therapist, in Pittsburgh, PA.

### **Liz McBride – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

The Graham Guitar was delivered to Liz McBride's office during the tail end of a blizzard. Following Dave Ogden's cautious advice, she let it sit in its shipping box for a few hours. Sudden shifts in temperature can cause a guitar's top to crack. Her song for Bert was Bert's 'Tell Me What is True Love', played note-for-note as Bert played it. On the wall behind Liz McBride hung a Ugandan flag in honour of her Ugandan mother. Next day she took the Graham out to see the snowy sights of the City of Bridges before packing him up to send to Hungrytown in Vermont.



### **Hungrytown (Rebecca Hall & Ken Anderson) – West Townshed, Vermont**



"Hungrytown is", according to their 80 Plays webpage, "the musical and married duo of singer Rebecca Hall and multi-instrumentalist Ken Anderson. They swapped their New York offices to live and make music in the hills of New England in 2004... their music evokes the classic folk songwriters of the 1960s and '70s, while their lyrics often sneak in modern perspectives. Hungrytown tour extensively in the USA and abroad."

When Rebecca first heard the music of Bert Jansch on FMU out of New Jersey, she "immediately went out and purchased *Rosemary Lane*." She recorded the title song on her second solo album, *Sunday Afternoon*" [1998]. Their Song for Bert is Bert's 'Morning Brings Peace of Mind', a version of which will be on Hungrytown's new album *Circus for Sale*.

In early February, Rebecca and Ken drove the Graham Guitar to Hungry Ghost Bread in Northampton, Massachusetts. There on the campus of Smith College, Jonathan Stevens and his family run an artisan bakery.

### **Jonathan Stevens – Northampton, Massachusetts**



As a young man, Jonathan often busked on the streets of Montreal, his hometown. 'Franklin's Nightmare' is his Song for Bert. "Obviously," Jonathan says, "it is a global-warming version of 'Lord Franklin,' one of my favourite Pentangle songs." The song concerns Captain Sir John Franklin's 1845 expedition to find the Northwest Passage.

*Goshen Barn Songs* is Jonathan Stevens' latest album. His first album, *Creationland* was released on the prestigious Flying Fish label in 1986

### **Allysen Callery – Bristol, Rhode Island**

Two weeks later, Allysen Callery picked up the Graham Guitar from Hungry Ghost Bread and played it at a gig she had nearby. Back home in Bristol, Rhode Island, she videoed her Song for Bert, 'Omie Wise', under a stick-work dome frame in a nearby woods. As a goth teenager she



says she "had a penchant for murder ballads and loved how a folk song could be used to tell a story of warning and news of the time." It was her parents' collection of British Isles folk revival records which provided the bedrock of her self-education in folk music. She taught herself singing by listening to Bert Jansch, Jacqui McShee, and Sandy Denny. "Omie Wise" was one of the first songs she learned to play.

Allysen regularly tours Germany, Switzerland, New England and old England. In Europe her music is billed as Ghost Folk.

## Gerry "Spooky Ghost" Leonard – Long Island City, New York



On St. Patrick's Day, Allyson shipped the Graham Guitar to Gerry "Spooky Ghost" Leonard in Long Island City, in the New York borough of Queens. It was Rebecca Hall who first noticed the poetic continuum in the Graham Guitar's New England travels. From Hungrytown to Hungry Ghost, from Ghost Folk to Spooky Ghost, after which the hungry haunting ceased.

Irish by nationality, Gerry had been David Bowie's music director and lead guitarist from 2003 to 2010. His musical contribution to Bowie's band was somewhat "spooky" in character, hence the sobriquet. While working with Bowie on *the Next Day*, his penultimate record, Gerry says the subject of Bert Jansch came up often. "I think," Gerry recalls, "he meant to do something in the style of Bert's amazing playing. We never, unfortunately, got to realize that idea." With that in mind, Gerry Leonard's Song for Bert is 'Angie Bowie', a seamless mashup of Bert's 'Angie' and Bowie's 'Gene Genie'. Gerry is currently touring with Suzanne Vega.

Next stop was to be **Meg Baird** in Philadelphia. Meg had come to prominence as guitarist and lead singer for the Philadelphia acid folk band Espers. Meg emailed DNL: She no longer lived in Philadelphia; she lived in Eureka in northern California. Danny Carnahan and the Graham Guitar would have passed right by her home the previous August!

## Rolly Brown – Sellersville, Pennsylvania

Next Stop then was Rolly Brown in Sellersville, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. An authority on the playing of Bert Jansch, many of Rolly's instructional videos are available at

[guitarvideos.com](http://guitarvideos.com). His advice to guitar students: "Don't just imitate the original musician. Imitate the originality." Rolly's Song for Bert, "Honor the Gardener,"

does just that. The title of Rolly's instrumental refers to Bert's suspicion that if he had not been a musician, he would have been a gardener. "I saw Bert perform several times through the 70s and 80s and played on the same bill with him at the Tasmanian Folk Festival in 1982. But I never got to meet him." Rolly is a consultant to the Bert Transcribed transcribers' group.



## Jay Ansill – Doylestown

Not quite Rolly Brown's next-door neighbour, Jay Ansill in Doylestown was Robin Williamson's East Coast tour manager / driver through the 1990s. "We crossed paths with Bert Jansch a number of times" says Jay, "and I got to spend some time with him". Jay's first exposure to folk music came via his interest in the Incredible String Band. "Through them" he says, "I found my way to John Renbourn, Martin Carthy and of course



Bert Jansch." Jay's first album, *Origami*, was released in 1989 on the prestigious Flying Fish label. In 2006, Jay released *A Lost World: Poems of Robert Graves*. A multi-instrumentalist, Jay has also composed music for many Off-Broadway theatre productions in New York. Jay Ansill's Song for Bert is "the Needle of Death," sung beautifully by Anne Hills.

To get back to the Bert Jansch Foundation in London, the Graham Guitar was first shipped back to Yreka, California. With family business to attend in September, David Nigel Lloyd was easily able to take the venerable instrument with him to England.

In London, DNL and the Graham guitar visited the graveside of Bert and Loren Jansch at Highgate Cemetery. "A somber moment indeed" said DNL.

From there, DNL and his wife Gita travelled north to Yorkshire. DNL performed with the Graham at the Trades Club in Hebden Bridge and at the Black Dyke Mills Heritage Venue in Queensbury, sharing the bill with Chris Brain, the last of the Graham Guitar's 80 Plays players.



## **Chris Brain – Leeds, West Yorkshire**

In front of an old handloom from the great building's heyday as a maker of worsted cloth, alpaca and mohair fabric, Chris Brain videoed his Song for Bert. "In my beginning is my end," as T. S. Eliot famously wrote. Chris chose 'Fresh as a Sweet Sunday Morning', the same Bert Jansch song Rick Chelew played at the beginning of the Graham Guitar's four-year journey.



Chris Brain was supporting *Bound to Rise*, his critically acclaimed first album. His second album, *Steady Away*, recorded with the aid of a Bert Jansch Foundation Grant for young acoustic musicians, was released in October 2023 has received airplay on BBC Radio 2.

The Graham's last outing was at the Forest Folk Club in Orepool on October 16th, 2022. Supporting **Hungrytown**, DNL finally met **Rebecca Hall** and her husband **Ken Anderson** in person. The trio were interviewed about the 80 Plays program by **Chris Arscot** for Dean Radio 95.7 FM. Several Bert Jansch fans were in the audience. During the intermission they clamoured round the Graham Guitar asking to be told about the players who had inked their names on the instrument's soundboard. DNL was only too happy to oblige.

Please go to <https://80plays.bertjanschfoundation.org/> to hear each of these Songs for Bert and read what these fine artists had to say about Bert, his music, and what it has meant to them.