

**SUBSCRIBE NOW** and get **3 MONTHS** for the **PRICE OF 1** **SUBSCRIBE NOW**

[Subscribe](#) | [Log In](#)

U.S. EDITION Thursday, April 25, 2013 As of 9:22 PM EDT

- [Home](#)
  - [World](#)
  - [U.S.](#)
  - [New York](#)
  - [Business](#)
  - [Tech](#)
  - [Markets](#)
  - [Market Data](#)
  - [Opinion](#)
  - [Life & Culture](#)
  - [Real Estate](#)
  - [Management](#)
  - [C-Suite](#)
- [News](#) [Sports](#) [Culture](#) [Real Estate](#)

<p>TOP STORIES IN NEW YORK <span style="float: right;">4 of 12</span></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">City Set to Police Bike Law</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5 of 12</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Subway Wireless Options Increase</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6 of 12</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">Court Rules a Photo of a Photo Can Become Art</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">S&amp;P Suit in Connecticut Stays There</a></p>
--	--	---	--

NY CULTURE | April 25, 2013, 9:22 p.m. ET

# A Return Written in the Stars

Article

Comments (1)

[MORE IN NEW YORK-CULTURE »](#)

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**



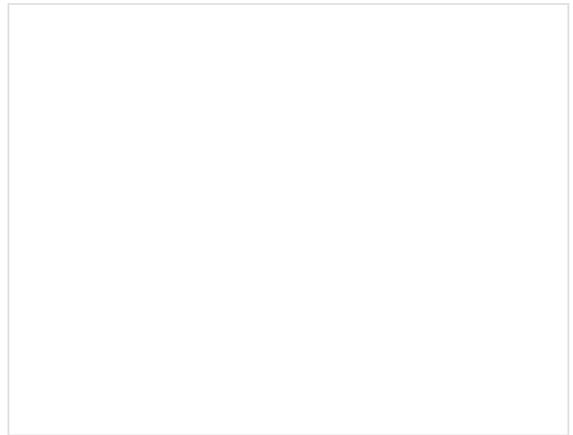
Cassandra Giraldo for The Wall Street Journal

Guitarist Don Bikoff at his home in Glen Cove.

For longer than he would have liked—four decades or so—Don Bikoff's core fan base could be counted on one hand, comprising mostly his wife, his children and his dutiful dog, who sometimes howled along when he played guitar at his suburban Long Island home. But now that his lone recorded musical work, 1968's "Celestial Explosion: Composita for 6-String Guitar," is being freshly excavated and exhumed, Mr. Bikoff has started to see that audience expand.

"I feel like it's my second coming," said Mr. Bikoff, a 66-year-old everyman otherwise established in a career selling chemical coatings and paint. "I've been a sales person and had so many jobs; I've done everything and anything. But I've always maintained my commitment to guitar. This is a second chance. I'm playing at some hipster bar in Williamsburg!"

Indeed, on Tuesday Mr. Bikoff will travel worlds away (actually, 25 miles) from his home in quiet Glen Cove to the stage at Union Pool to revisit "Celestial Explosion," which was reissued in February on the small Tompkins Square label.



**THE NEW PORTFOLIO TOOL ON WSJ.COM:**  
 ENTER YOUR BROKERAGE ACCOUNT DETAILS.  
 WE'LL GIVE YOU ALL THE NEWS AND INFO YOU NEED.

[LEARN MORE](#)

provided by LikeAssets

Available to WSJ.com Subscribers

**Directors Take Shelter in Trading Plans**



**IBM's Chief: Think Fast, Move Faster**



**GE Capital Cuts Gun Financing**



**Washington's Taxing Problem: Spending**

When he recorded his hitherto neglected debut, Mr. Bikoff lived in the city and trafficked in the brimming 1960s Greenwich Village folk scene.



Don Bikoff

Mr. Bikoff performs on the 'Ted Mack Amateur Hour' broadcast in 1968.

A native of Oyster Bay, he was devoted to an expressive style of finger-picked acoustic guitar, and haunted the coffee shops and clubs from an early age. Formative experiences included frequent trips as a teenager to the Gaslight Café to see Dave Van Ronk, a galvanizing guitarist and the archly appointed "Mayor of MacDougal Street."

"I was a fly on the wall but not exactly, because he found me rather obnoxious

when I sat in the front row week after week with a little note pad, trying to write down chords and what he was doing," Mr. Bikoff said. "He would occasionally pick me out in the crowd and yell at me. But after a few months, he took me under his wing...somewhat."

As he developed his chops, Mr. Bikoff started performing around town at cafés and at gatherings of the League for Spiritual Discovery. "What's the acronym?" Mr. Bikoff asked, leadingly, of the religious group guided by the acid guru Timothy Leary. As to whether he himself partook in "spiritual discovery," Mr. Bikoff said: "If the guitar turned into a butterfly I couldn't have played it, so I kept myself pretty straight."

It was in that milieu that he created "Celestial Explosion" for a tiny label established by Edward Thomas, the producer of a jingle for Dorman's Endico Cheese (the first cheese with "paper between the slices") and a series of Christmas records for Firestone tires. Mr. Bikoff's droning, instrumental compositions were inspired by the sounds of the stringed Japanese koto, Eastern classic music and contemporary blues—not far outside the realm that pop figures such as George Harrison were exploring at the time. Five-thousand copies of "Celestial Explosion" were released in 1968, but fame, ever fickle, was not his to be had.

After moving to Long Island in the early '70s, Mr. Bikoff commenced a career as a school teacher and later as the chairman of Carnegie Chemical & Color Co., a small distributor of coatings, lacquers, varnishes, solvents and paints. He raised three children and, save for occasional gigs at local restaurants and his friend's motorcycle shop, kept his guitar-playing cloistered at home.

Then last year, a DJ at WFMU in Hoboken, N.J., found a copy of "Celestial Explosion" and passed it on to the Tompkins Square label. What followed was a renewed call to action. "There aren't many guitar records that haven't been reissued in some way, shape or form, and on top of that this one was very, very good," said Josh Rosenthal, who manages new releases and archival finds for Tompkins Square. "And he still has chops."

Mr. Bikoff had been playing his collection of vintage guitars, which he keeps in a humidity-controlled room at home, all the while. But his musicianship was mostly a family affair. "Every year my children would say, 'Dad, we're buying you studio time,'" he said. "There's a studio in Glen Cove that did Twisted Sister. But I just wasn't motivated to start that again until things started happening over the last year."

The re-release of "Celestial Explosion" has garnered rave reviews. "Just when the American Primitive vaults seem to have given up the bulk of their treasures, another jewel emerges," began a notice in Mojo Magazine, which slotted Mr. Bikoff in with so-called "American Primitive" guitar luminaries like John Fahey, Leo Kottke and Robbie Basho.

"Back in the day, there was no such thing as 'American Primitive'—I called myself contemporary," Mr. Bikoff laughed.



GET 3 MONTHS FOR THE PRICE OF 1

SUBSCRIBE NOW

## Most Popular

Read Emailed Video Commented

1. [Einstein Proved Right on Gravity—Again](#)
2. [Soros Takes Stake in J.C. Penney](#)
3. [House Immigration Differences Emerge](#)
4. [Judge Made Call to Advise Bomb Suspect](#)
5. [New Twinkie Maker Shuns Union Labor](#)

Real-t

/ York

### Weather Journal: Picnic Weather This Weekend

A period of stable, warm weather is in store for the near future for Greater New York.



### Manhattan's Crash Pad for Modern Mennonites

It's possible to rent an apartment in Manhattan's upscale Gramercy Park neighborhood for less than \$500 a month. The trick? You have to know-or, even better, be-a member of the Mennonite faith.



### NYPD: Boston Suspects Planned to Attack Times Square

### 30 More Subway Stations Wired for Wi-Fi

### Hard Plastics Accepted for Recycling in City

See All

RSS Feed

## More in New York-Culture

[Guitarist's Comeback Is Written in the Stars](#)

## Getting Around Greater New York

Starting Address

OR Intersection or Popular Restaurant/Place

Destination Address

OR Intersection or Popular Restaurant/Place

## Related Topics

[Broadway Shows](#)  
[Lincoln Center](#)  
[Metropolitan Opera](#)

[NY Philharmonic](#)  
[American Ballet Theater](#)  
[Museum of Modern Art](#)

Similar appreciations have tumbled out in other publications and blogs, but Mr. Bikoff is beginning to shift his focus to the present—and aspirations for a future that reconnects with his past. He's working on a follow-up album in a studio in nearby Patchogue, and a local instrument maker is even crafting a signature Don Bikoff guitar.

His sound, too, has compelled younger artists turned on by the tradition of idiomatic folk forms.

"It's cool to connect with a guy who's been going since the '60s and to see things come full-circle for him," said Daniel Bachman, a 23-year-old guitarist and Tompkins Square labelmate who will perform with Mr. Bikoff at his comeback concert in Brooklyn.

His 35-year hiatus from recording notwithstanding, Mr. Bikoff attributes his surprise second life in music to a decision he made early on and maintained, however deferentially, as his life progressed in other directions. "I never stopped playing," he said, before picking up a guitar in his living room and playing once again.

#### Watch Free Movies Here

Instant Access to Watch Movies Online. 100% Free Download!  
[trailerclips.com](http://trailerclips.com)

#### Day Trade Stock

Find Financial Services Solutions For Your Business. Get It Done Now!  
[www.business.com](http://www.business.com)

#### Top Stock Newsletter

Hot Penny Stocks With 1000% even 2000% Gains! Don't Miss Next Alert!  
[www.EliteOTC.com](http://www.EliteOTC.com)

JOIN THE DISCUSSION  
**1 Comment, add yours**

MORE IN  
**New York-Culture »**

Email

Print

Order Reprints

**THE NEW PORTFOLIO TOOL ON WSJ.COM:**  
ENTER YOUR BROKERAGE ACCOUNT DETAILS.  
WE'LL GIVE YOU ALL THE NEWS AND INFO YOU NEED.

LEARN MORE

provided by LikeAssets

#### Hot Stock Pick

Invest in Massive Dynamics Inc. New 3-D Printing Tech. Buy Stock Now!  
[www.MassiveDynamics.com](http://www.MassiveDynamics.com)

#### Best - Tattoo Removers

Latest Tattoo Removal News. What Works? Find Out - Before You Buy.  
[www.TattooRemovalAssociation.com](http://www.TattooRemovalAssociation.com)

#### Proven trading strategy

Step by step Binary Option training Based on a mathematical algorithm  
[www.BinaryCoach.com](http://www.BinaryCoach.com)

#### Stock Brokers/Traders

Looking For Day Trade Stock? Find It Nearby With Local.com!  
[Local.com](http://Local.com)

## Add a Comment

JOURNAL COMMUNITY

[View All Comments \(1\)](#)

[Community rules](#)

To add a comment please

[Log in](#)

[Create an Account](#)

Your real name is required  
for commenting.

Track replies to my comment

CLEAR

POST