

Accordion player brings yearlong gig tour to Concord

By Kimberly A. Hooper/Staff Writer

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When Susan Ehrreich-Sisak went to Verrill Farm in Concord last week to pick up some corn for her grandchildren, she didn't imagine she would be dancing the polka on the farm's patio, too. "This is unbelievable," Ehrreich-Sisak, of Sudbury said, as she danced around effortlessly. "I really, really needed this today. It's like an emotional tune-up for me." As Michael Ward-Bergeman, 41, played his accordion near the corn and tomatoes he closed his eyes, sang and smiled as the bright sunshine delicately hit his fingertips while they brushed the accordion's keyboard.

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As Michael Ward-Bergeman, 41, played his accordion near the corn and tomatoes he closed his eyes, sang and smiled as the bright sunshine delicately hit his fingertips while they brushed the accordion's keyboard. Visitors and shoppers at the farm shucked corn in rhythm to the tunes.

It was day number 271 of the year, meaning it was also Ward-Bergeman's 271st gig, leaving 94 left until he completes his goal of playing his accordion at 365 different locations, over the course of 365 days. Ward-Bergeman decided to take this journey because he wanted to experience creating music for a year.

"When the decision was finally made to do this in 2011," Ward-Bergeman said, "I knew that even if the experiment 'failed' in some way, I would have reached at least one person a day through music and made some kind of connection if I stayed focused."

Ernest Stern, of Concord, heard from his daughter that Ward-Bergeman was looking to play his accordion in Concord. He immediately contacted the musician and told him about Verrill Farm.

A musician from Long Island, N.Y., Ward-Bergeman lived in London for about 10 years then moved to South America for a few months at the beginning of 2010. Most recently, he moved to Florida to prepare for GIG 365 in 2011.

"I rented a house close to my dad's," Ward-Bergeman said. "He helped me build some of the instruments and customize the van. I live out of my van for a lot of the time, camping at national parks whenever I have a chance. Experiencing all of the uniquely beautiful National Parks the USA has to offer has been a revelation."

So why did Ward-Bergeman decide to play the accordion everyday in 2011?

"Initially I didn't stipulate that I had to play the accordion everyday of 2011," he said. "I thought I might also play piano, and/or other instruments I am traveling with (drums/percussion). But for some reason after a few weeks, I realized that I should be playing accordion everyday, and the other instruments would more or less fill things out if I felt it made sense."

Ward-Bergeman said by the end of the tour he will have played in about 40 of the United States, England and Scotland, Venezuela, Denmark, Spain and France. He said he enjoyed playing at Verrill because it was the "ideal gig" for the GIG 365 Project.

"I met a lovely woman (Ehrreich-Sisak) who shared her reaction to the music: that it was a blessing for her," Ward-Bergeman said. "I value the opportunity to play at businesses that have been family owned and operated for many years, such as Verrill Farm."

Oscar Cainer, 26, of London, has known Ward-Bergeman for over six years and said by the end of GIG 365, he will have followed his friend on his journey for about seven months, filming and documenting the experience.

"I will be creating a documentary after we are done traveling," Cainer said, who is a sound engineer and worked with Ward-Bergeman's band, Groanbox, in England as their tour manager. "This has been a wild, incredible and mind-overloading ride."

Cainer said Ward-Bergeman has played at least one gig a day since Jan. 1, and sometimes plays two or three gigs.

Ward-Bergeman said the most difficult part of playing everyday is finding the locations he plays at.

"I've had about half the gigs this year booked beforehand, but the rest I have to get just before, or more often than not, on the day of the gig itself," he said. "I go into any place I feel moved to go into, and ask for a gig."

Ward-Bergeman said it was difficult at first to find venues to play at because he was unsure of himself.

"As a result, I think people refused my offer a lot more," he said. "Lately I've been having a lot more success on the first try, and I've also been more adventurous about where I might ask to play."

Cainer said it has been both gratifying and exciting to form relationships with people they have met along the GIG 365 route.

"We've realized, through GIG 365, that people are just people," he said. "They all can be reached by music."

While in Boston, Ward-Bergeman is performing at Harvard University with the [Silk Road Project](#), a nonprofit arts and educational organization that takes inspiration from the historic Silk Road trading routes as a modern metaphor for multicultural and interdisciplinary exchange, according to their website. Ward-Bergeman has also been asked to write a piece for the Silk Road Ensemble.

As Ward-Bergeman finished playing his final piece at Verrill Farm, Stern and Ehrreich-Sisak, who met for the first time that day at the farm, shared one final dance together.

"This made my day," Ehrreich-Sisak said. "It's a heaven-sent kind of event for me because dancing is my life."