

Mustard's Retreat – Biography

Mustard's Retreat (David Tamulevich and Michael Hough), met in Ann Arbor, MI in 1974, as short order cooks, both on hiatus from their studies at the University of Michigan. Discovering a mutual interest in music/writing and performing, they put together 3 songs one day after work, and took them to the legendary Ark coffeehouse's open mike night. They were a big hit, and, on the spot, were invited back to do a 45 minute set 2 weeks later. Within a year and a half they had both quit the restaurant and were doing music full time. 37 years later, they have 9 highly acclaimed recordings of their own, plus 2 more CDs with their songwriting collective, The Yellow Room Gang. Mustard's Retreat has performed more than 4,000 shows over those years, traveled more than 1 million miles and in doing so, have earned a dedicated and loyal following, many of whom have been coming to hear them since the 1970s. Michael and David joke on stage about attracting people "with long attention spans", but it is what Mustard's Retreat gives them that turns audiences into such loyal fans.

Spike Barkin, who produces the prestigious Roots of American Music Festival at New York City's Lincoln Center, wrote to thank them for their "folk from the heart," going on to say it seemed like David and Michael "take your living room on the road with you and invite people in as friends." David Siglin, of Ann Arbor's premier folk club, The Ark, where Mustard's Retreat did that first open mike, and have head-lined many, many times since said, "In order to last, there has to be more than just talent - you have to enjoy playing, enjoy audiences and enjoy being in front of them. Audiences go to your shows because they know they will be entertained." Margie Rosenkranz, manager of the Eighth Step at Proctor's Theatre in Schenectady, NY, who has presented Mustard's Retreat many times, said a Mustard's Retreat show "reminds us why we're doing this, pulls people together," adding that the duo transcends the vagaries of passing trends because they remain so "in tune with the audience."

"I work with them several times a year and always wish it was more." said Canadian songwriter Garnet Rogers, who also produced their landmark recording *The Wind and the Crickets*. "The thing that always impresses me is the incredible openness they have with the audience. They stand up there and just radiate friendliness; the audience is included in the whole process, encouraged to sing along and talk back. I've learned a lot from them in that sense."

"They are so warm and friendly and giving on stage, completely in touch with their audience," said Tom Paxton, a folk music star for more than 40 years. "There are no barriers at all, and you just love to watch that and be part of it. But the thing that strikes me about them from Jump Street - and that makes it all work so well - is that their time is so tight. Michael is such a wonderful, simple bass player; his time is just flawless. And that's why two guys can move you musically the way they do - they have a gorgeous sense of time and tempo, a real musicality to what they do. They're nice guys on stage and entertaining as hell, but there's also music in them."

While both Tamulevich and Hough are grounded in the early traditional 60s folk music boom, they also were influenced by the songwriters of that time, and their shows represent an eclectic blend of music, old and new, with a big dash of storytelling. “We have never performed the same show twice,” says Tamulevich, “Each night is its own unique moment, unique audience. For us, that is the exciting thing, the magic: to craft a shared experience and leave people entertained and moved...and with moments and songs they will take away with them and remember, ponder, rediscover; hopefully for years to come.” Many of those moments are the result of their well-respected and broad body of original material, written both individually and together. “We take our writing very seriously.” says Tamulevich, “No matter if it is a serious or humorous song. A song is a tool to communicate a feeling or a story, and we want it to be as sharp and finely focused as we can make it. It is a challenge that we happily embrace. Each song is a unique puzzle, and it is fun to see where it can and does take you as you write it. Michael and I are both very different people and writers; having different strengths, and that diversity, when we can get it right, can make a song a whole lot richer and more effective. It is a very rewarding process.”

Those memorable songs have been a hallmark of Mustard’s Retreat from the first. The spooky, *Mallon’s Bridge*, that tells the story of a haunted bridge in Ireland and the midnight encounter that takes place there, has been a staple of Folk radio on Halloween since it first came out in the early 1980s. *There’s A Dance Tonight* celebrates love and community, the poignant *Part of Me Remembers*, the humorous *Michigan Mosquitoes*, the anthemic (*Ours is a Simple Faith* and *Gather the Family*...to the insightful and powerful *Pay the Toll*...all and more have received extensive airplay and many have been covered by other singers.

“And it is still new, fresh, exciting...and fun” concludes Tamulevich. “We still really enjoy all of this: the writing and the performing. Audiences let us know that they enjoy it as well. They have taken our music and made it a part of their lives: that is the ultimate compliment, and as long as they want to see us, we plan to keep performing.”

**LETTERS FROM PRESENTERS –
The Mustard's Retreat Family/Children's show**

"Today's kids show was pure magic. I can't wait to work with you again. In twenty-plus years of concert and festival producing I can't remember a more enthusiastic, focused audience of kids. You captured the kids' attention right from the beginning and held it for 45 minutes. You had them singing, clapping, and having a great time doing it. Even the stage crew was singing along with you.

..your high energy, genuine warmth, funny songs, beautiful voices, and good spirits still reverberate. In over 25 years presenting music festivals and concerts I have never seen kids react and interact at a children's program as they did with your specially designed show....You guys were amazing. I have presented Mustard's Retreat previously in an adult setting, and the songs and harmonies were wonderful. But your kids' show went even further. I don't think I have ever seen kids and parents as transfixed as they were at your "Just for Kids" show.

Thank you also for your "show must go on" attitude when midway through your program the skies opened up with the downpour and you guys literally went acoustic off stage under the protective overhang in the plaza and the hundreds of kids went with you, staying to hear the rest of your set." **-Lincoln Center, New York City**

"You and Michael have such a nice way with children your songs and stories and interesting and fun and you were able to capture the children's attention and imagination ... Over the past 15 years we have presented over 40 children's programs and Mustard's Retreat was the best musical performance we have had." **- Festival on the Green, Middlebury, VT**

"Songs, rhymes and stories! Fun and frivolity! Exactly what you'd expect from Mustard's Retreat; exactly what you'd want for a children's concert."
-Ann Arbor Summer Festival

"During its ten seasons, the Festival has presented some of the nation's finest children's performers. Here in Ann Arbor, Mustard's Retreat is unsurpassed in their appeal, both to kids and adults. The duo is witty and fun-loving, and in addition to outstanding voices, they possess the singular ability to entice everyone into joining in on imaginative original works and well-know classics. Very few artists have their talent for creating such a warm rapport with their audience." **- The Ark, Ann Arbor, MI**

"You gave an outstanding performance that was liked by both our young audience and their families. Since that evening, many people have told me how much they enjoyed themselves. You consistently rise to the high expectations of quality. It shows in the songs you write, your enjoyment of performing, and in the high level of audience involvement you maintain." **- Holly Area Schools**

"What an outstanding afternoon..!!!! I've heard nothing but positive comments... Needless to say you were a hit! **- Leslie Public Schools**