

Dec. 1, 1993—

While recently chowing down on tamale salami chili and surfing across television, I came across a familiar refrain. David Gates, formerly of the band Bread, was on a cable special wearing a cowboy hat and singing his hits with country star Billy Dean.

Sure, Gates pondered some milquetoast topics, but early '70s songs like "Everything I Own," "Diary," "Make It With You" and "If" were extremely well-crafted pieces of work - intricate, yet dignified. The current pop-oriented country music climate is perfect for Gates' return.

"I discovered the songs I like to write are pretty close to today's country ballads," Gates said from his ranch near Mount Shasta in northern California. "You have to cut out a few hot chords here and there and not get too fancy, but my goal is to continue to write what I'm best at and work within the Nashville scene to get them recorded."

Most people don't realize that Gates, 53, attended high school with country-rockers J.J. Cale and Leon Russell in Tulsa, Ok. Russell—then Claude Russell—was a member of The Accents, Gates' first high school band. He attributed his conscientious approach to developing a hook and melody to music he heard around his Oklahoma house.

"My dad (for whom he wrote "Everything I Own") was a band and orchestra director who also taught at Vandercook College of Music in Chicago," Gates said. "My mom taught piano in our home. My older brothers and sisters all played instruments, so I grew up in a musical environment that was mostly classical.

"When I was 3 or 4 we had a record player and I'd sit there in front of those speakers and soak up things like Beethoven's 7th, my favorite. I went on to play violin and conduct. So, if you add a love of rock 'n' roll to that formal training, you end up with Bread songs, where you have some structure and some melody, a little more complicated musically, but they're still in the pop format."

Today, about 75 percent of Gates' time is involved in ranching alfalfa and cattle. He studied cattle ranching while touring with Bread. He otherwise plays golf and writes.

Next to his house, Gates has a 24-track studio where he plays bass, piano and guitar. Gates has begun to co-write with Dean, who was a big Bread fan; the two will team up on the Bread hit "Guitar Man" on the Nashville Network's "American Music Shop" later this month. Dean is produced by Jimmy Bowen, whose relationship with Gates goes back to the mid-'60s, when they both worked in Los Angeles.

"I went to Nashville four months ago with some new songs," Gates explained. "Jimmy was one of the guys I took my tape to. I just wondered if my songs were appropriate for country." Bowen loved Gates' rich melodies and connected him with Dean.

The Gates ballad "I Can't Find the Words to Say Goodbye" is slated for Dean's next album. Promoters have been after Gates to go on the road, and next year it's likely he will tour in some capacity.

"There's a lot of demand for the old things," said Gates, who keeps in regular contact with Bread drummer Larry Ketchel, a Nashville resident and former member of Duane Eddy's Rebels.

"It wouldn't be a nostalgia thing. It would consist of rhythm sections and orchestras. I've always wanted to do an orchestra tour, and there's a lot of these community symphonies we could use. There's a very good chance we'll do it next fall, where we'd mix the old hits with the new things."

*AUTHOR'S NOTE--- The spring of 2022 marked the 50-year anniversary of the release of "Everything I Own." Maybe only after you have lost your father do you realize that David Gates wrote the ballad about his father.*