

JOHN ROLFE

## Note The Smooth Segue

By ShopTalk

Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram

[E-mail this page](#)

[Reader Comments \(below\)](#)

Thursday, December 14, 2006



Staff photo by Shawn Patrick Ouellette  
Bob Charest performs at the Marriott at Sable Oaks in South Portland last week. Charest left the corporate world for the band three years ago. The band will play at Gov. John Baldacci's Inauguration Gala on Jan 4.

### Bob Charest

The Bob Charest Band,  
Westbrook

AGE: 54

HOW LONG IN THIS JOB: Nine years

PREVIOUS JOBS: System programmer with Unum, Maine Savings Bank, Hannaford. "When I was in college, one of my summer jobs was cutting curbstone from Blue Rock. A bunch of the curbstone on Cumberland Avenue, the end towards MaineMed, I cut by hand."

CONTACT INFO: 797-3848

[www.bobcharestmusic.com](http://www.bobcharestmusic.com)

[info@bobcharestmusic.com](mailto:info@bobcharestmusic.com)

**Q:** Did you study music in college (at the University of New Hampshire)?

**A:** I did, composition.

**Q:** So how did you get into the computer thing?

**A:** Well, I had worked for a decade in bands. I got into a successful commercial trio (Isengard) and taught at the University of Maine in Augusta and Bowdoin. But I was playing six nights a week, five sets a night, with weddings on Saturday during the day. And teaching three days a week at UMA and one at Bowdoin. That was from 1978 to '84. That trio set me up; I ended up getting my own Steinway (But) Cindy and I were married and I thought it would be nice if I had a work situation where I was not always gone.

So I spent a decade in music, two decades in (information technology), then decided to go back to music and make a living. That was in January of 2003. So now, teaching privately and playing in the band are what I do for a living.

**Q:** Bit of a contrast between the corporate and music worlds.

**A:** The business stuff, that time in the corporate world, was really invaluable. Just being exposed to the different ways people's lives are shaped by business, and learning how to run a business -- what are the expectations for communication, clarity, presentation.

Working with other people and maximizing their strengths, I enjoy very much from a management perspective. So the time I spent at all three places was very valuable and served me very well as I moved forward on my own. It wasn't like, 'Oh, those awful jobs!'

**Q:** What did I interrupt you doing?

**A:** Typical Tuesday daytime stuff, making sure we're ready for rehearsal tonight. We'll be bringing in at least one new tune, "Put Your Records On," by Corrine Bailey Rae.

**Q:** Who brings in the songs?

**A:** Me. I do all the arranging. Every now and then another band member will. We always have new stuff to work on, something to get our teeth into at rehearsal.

**Q:** So you play keyboards and sing

**A:** And I end up running the lights with my feet, and mixing the band -- the mixer is next to me. And I have a mike to talk just to the band, to let them know what's coming next. I'm also looking at the crowd, thinking about who's sung what tune, where am I in the set, what time of night it is, to keep things moving so that at the end of the evening we reach the highest level. It's like playing 3-D chess.

**Q:** Has your wife been with the band the whole time?

**A:** Not at first, when the kids were really small. But they're 16 and 14 now and Cindy's been singing with us for a while, which enables us to do those four-part harmonies.

**Q:** Does the husband/wife business thing work OK?

**A:** Cindy and I are both strong-minded, and we both have business experience. So we do not always agree, and it's hard for both of us to allow ourselves to be moved off a position. But the fortunate part is, we realize that we're complementary in our perceptions, so we make a very strong team.

One thing we do agree on is that a band can have only one leader. So that can be a difficult one for Cindy, because we're business partners, but as a member of the band she has to sublimate that a bit. At the same time, on stage, she and the other two singers are the focal point. So there's a balance.

**Q:** So you play a lot of weddings, but not just weddings --

**A:** I think the total number of gigs is 60 to 65 a year. The lion's share of that is wedding receptions, but the work is really multifaceted. We've played at La Kermesse the past two summers. We've played for the Eastern Maine Electrical Cooperative up by Calais, in Danforth. And managed to get people dancing in a tent before noon.

We play a number of holiday parties and corporate events, and we're playing at the Marriott in South Portland on New Year's Eve. And the (Gov.) Baldacci inaugural gala on Jan 4.

**Q:** Will you hike your fee for the Baldacci gala?

**A:** No!

**Q:** Will it be your highest-profile gig to date?

**A:** Oh gee, I don't know. I hesitate to qualify things that way, out of deference to other clients. Like La Kermesse, which is attended by many thousands.

**Q:** What is your fee?

**A:** Locally -- in the Greater Portland area -- a bit over \$4,000 is our going rate. We also have some nonprofit rates that we've been happy to extend to organizations like Mission Possible and Riding To The Top.

**Q:** How far afield do you go?

**A:** The farthest north we've gone is Caribou. But our range is really Bangor to Boston.

**Q:** Ever had to fire anybody in the band?

**A:** Uh, no. I have let people go, but not for reasons like bad behavior and not representing the business well -- just because we needed to make musical changes. The majority of people in the band, and the road crew, have been together since the beginning.

**Q:** Do you have any riders, like bowls of green M&Ms?

**A:** Nope! The only thing we ever need is, if we're playing at a tent venue, to make sure we're insulated from the ground. And that we're covered against rain. Aside from that, we need a certain amount of room -- 12 feet by 24 feet. We've played in smaller spaces, but a certain point it's cheek to jowl, and it limits our movements and our involvement with the audience.

**Q:** What's hard about the business?

**A:** Just in terms of energy, it can be a challenge to make sure that everyone gets everything they ought to, from a client standpoint. One weekend this summer on Friday we were at the Nonantum in Kennebunkport, on Saturday at the Asticou in Bar Harbor, and Sunday at the Spruce Point Inn in Boothbay Harbor.

One part that's challenging is working for myself at home. I've really got to be very disciplined about knowing when to shut off and be at home -- just hang with the kids and do something fun.

**Q:** Does stuff ever go wrong on stage?

**A:** Things go bump now and again. I remember one time I was playing "I Love You Just The Way You Are" and I started it in the wrong key. But my trumpet player has perfect pitch, so he told the other horn player and they transposed on the spot, and Tom (D, bass player) moved to the new key. So nobody actually knew. But inside, I die a thousand deaths. I'm smiling, but inside I'm screaming at myself, 'you idiot!'

We've had times when the power died. Once at the Caribou Performing Arts Center, at the end of the first set we were doing "Soul Man" and the power died just as we stormed into the key change. So everybody stepped forward and sang to finish the song.

We've been very fortunate. No horror stories!

ABOUT SHOPTALK - SHOPTALK ALLOWS people to describe in their own words the rewards and challenges of their jobs. In doing so, they reflect the energy, imagination and hard work that characterize the workplace in Maine. THE QUESTIONS for Shoptalk are compiled by Staff Writer John Rolfe. Do you know of someone who would make an interesting candidate for Shoptalk? SEND YOUR suggestion to [jrolfe@pressherald.com](mailto:jrolfe@pressherald.com) -->