



Ryan Eavis Pursues Advanced Bluegrass Studies in Texas by Sue Decker

“I guess I’ve always been kind of a dreamer.” And so he is. Ryan Eavis sat down to chat with me for a few moments before heading to South Plains College in Texas. “If you have a dream, it’s worth a shot. It’s worked out ‘till now.” And so it has. Ryan was accepted into the SPC Bluegrass music program for September. This is a two year learning experience with classes offered on all aspects of making music, including recording and marketing.

Alumnae of this highly regarded program include LeeAnn Womack and, closer to home, Jenny Lester.

Ryan has been part of NBCMS for a few years and many of us have had the pleasure of listening to his great voice, banjo and guitar playing at the jam. We’ve watched him progress in leaps and bounds with his fiddle playing in the last several months. Ryan started playing guitar in junior high school but he was too shy to play in front of anyone. After completing school in Nova Scotia, he came to Alberta to pursue another dream—to be a working cowboy. Around that time, he heard some bluegrass and was inspired to take up the banjo for something to do in his free time on the ranch. In the few intervening years, Ryan has come to the point where he is ready to pursue music full time. NBCMS gave Ryan his first experiences making music with other people. He could almost always be found at the weekly jam; often staying into the wee hours, trading instruments,



Photo by Sue Decker

songs, and laughs with other members. He will be studying both fiddle and banjo at SPC and he hopes to find some like-minded musicians among the other students to form a band. There’s no telling how far Ryan will go with teaching from staff who are active producers, engineers, and artists as well as access to the SPC facilities such as recording studios and a new live sound lab. According to Bill Allen

from *Americana Music Times*, “This is not a dream ladies and gentleman; this is South Plains College.” When it comes to his musical journey until now, Ryan feels that NBCMS has given him “basically everything”. Keep dreaming Ryan—we’re behind you all the way!



Ryan Eavis at Texas South Plains College

Photo Supplied by Erin Kushniruk



www.bluegrassnorth.com



Articles submitted to Bluegrass Bulletin (BB) may be edited, however, care is taken to preserve the writer's intent. Photographs may be cropped, but are not otherwise altered.

We welcome written articles and Photos. Unfortunately, BB does not have the space to publish all material submitted



Presidents Message by Carolyn Hotte



Photo by Doug Reid

It has been a busy summer; I hope you were able to find time to relax, visit with family and friends, to attend jams and enjoy some of the many summer festivals. A few moments that stick out in my mind are the storm at Blueberry it was a dilly. Thanks to the bluegrass community the show went on. Luckily no one was hurt unfortunately Big Valley was not as lucky. Our best wishes go out to the families that were affected by this ferocious act of nature. On a happier note I attended the Northern Lights Bluegrass Festival in Ness Creek Saskatchewan. "Ida Red" performed a tweener act and the Spinney Brothers joined us for our last song; that was a real treat. This is a great festival and they also have a workshop the week before this may be something you want to consider for next year. The Steel Drivers were at the Edmonton Folk Festival and we travelled to Sorrento for week one of the BCBW. Smoke filled the air and we were on evacuation watch. The fire was 6 km away and watching the trees exploding and the fire moving was a scary sight but in spite of it we managed to have a great week. It is such an eye opening experience to attend festivals and workshops there are so many familiar faces and new acquaintances to be made. Bluegrass is such a family, friendly and heart warming music. I love it!

We said good-bye and congratulations to Ryan Eavis this past August. He is off to South Plains College in Levelland, Texas to further his musical journey. Good luck and come back and see us when you can. He will be missed around the circle.

With the arrival of fall it is time once again to get back into our monthly routines. We will host a Slow-Pitch Jam once a month on the first Wednesday. Our Executive meetings continue to be held the second Wednesday and the last Wednesday is reserved for an Open Stage/Band Scramble Night. Please re-

member that the basement is available for jamming. Take advantage of the space, a common concern is the size of the jamming circle using both spaces will help with this concern. If you would like to volunteer to host the slow pitch jam please let me know.

On September 20th The Alberta Arts Foundation and the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society got involved with the community in celebration of Alberta Arts and Culture. NBCMS members performed at the Muttart Conservatory, Colors of Music - Bluegrass Style. Alberta Arts Days was a three-day celebration of Alberta's arts and culture that ran from September 18th-20th. Albertans everywhere brought the very spirit of Alberta to life.

Our 10th Annual Bluegrass Workshop is just around the corner. October 2nd - 4th. The kick off concert "Bluegrass Breakdown" highlighting some of our workshop instructors is Thursday October 1st at the Central Lions Senior Centre, 11113-113 St. The doors open at 6:30 the show starts at 7:00 PM. The bands are The Blue Canyon Boys, (Denver, Colorado) www.bluecanyonboys.com Brother Mule, (Minnesota, Idaho, Colorado) www.brothermule.com and The Breakmen, (Vancouver, BC) www.thebreakmen.com

Everyone's welcome! Free admission is included with your Workshop Registration.

Please plan to attend our Semi-Annual General Meeting on Wednesday, October 14th at Pleasantview Community Hall 10860-57 Ave. 7:00 PM. Come out and hear what's been happening over the past year. Let's discuss future possibilities. Get involved, this is your club.

Our first concert for this season is Friday, November 6th. Presenting Dale Ann Bradley the 2007/2008 IBMA Vocalist of the Year! www.daleann.com it will be at the Royal Alberta Museum Theatre 12845-102 Ave Doors 7:30 * Show 8:00 PM. Dale Ann Bradley has three IBMA nominations for 2009. Female Vocalist

of the Year, Entertainer of the Year and vocal group of the Year! Joining Dale Ann Bradley on stage will be Terry Baucom (banjo, vocals) Tim Laughlin (mandolin, fiddle, vocals) and Brandon Goodman (fiddle). This is one concert you don't want to miss! Opening for Dale Ann Bradley is Edmonton's own, The Stringband.

Our Christmas Party/Jam will be on December 16th. Proceeds will go to Brail Tone Music Society of Canada and Edmonton's Mustard Seed Church.

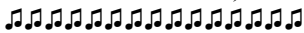
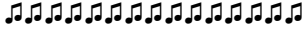
There have been new additions to the library in the past few weeks. If you have any items that are over due please return them so they will be available for someone else.

Keep on Jammin'

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Visit us online at
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The deadline for the next newsletter is Dec 2, 2009

The Bluegrass Bulletin is published four times a year to provide information and recognition to NBCMS members


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Membership Benefits by Cindy Pearce



Photo by Carolyn Hotte

What a vacation - check out the picture and the song from Sorrento's week 2 !!

NBCMS was present at the 20th BC Bluegrass Workshop, located at Sorrento Centre, in the (this year) smoky Shuswap Lake area. We had the opportunity to set up at the sidewalk sale each week. Camp He Ho Ha information was on our table and several people showed interest in it. We were there to let people know about our club. The free stickers and tattoos went over well.

We do have some new merchandise to sell. Ball caps \$20, coffee mugs \$20, luggage tags \$5, and lanyards \$3.

If club members get a chance - we are celebrating Alberta Arts Days. Bring your instrument and your membership card to the Muttart Conservatory, Sunday September 20 between 1 and 4, and jam in the pyramids..... If you get a chance, drop by the Hall and put your name on the list of participants - or at the very least, drop us an email so we can put you on the list.....

Happy Pickin'



Bluegrass Music Jam

Hosted by NBCMS

Wednesday's 6:45 PM

Pleasantview Community Hall

10860-57 Avenue

Sorrento, Opus Words and Music by: Sorrento Songwriting Class 2009 - Mike Petroff, Mira McLaws,

Marlene Bernier, Cindy Pearce, Cal Wilson, Mark Van, Steve Spurgin - September 2, 2009



Photo by Cindy Pearce

We packed up our camp gear, guitars and whiskey
Traveled from near and afar
The call of Sorrento, a twenty year party
Drew us like wasps to a fire

Notch Hill provided the birthday cake candles
The music and jams were intense
We all persevered through smoke and sore throats
But we're here and the effort made sense

O, SORRENTO
MY LUNGS ARE STILL BURNING
I LONG FOR BRIGHT SUN IN THE SKIES
O, SORRENTO
THE SMOKE ON THE SHUSWAP
HAS SURELY BROUGHT TEARS TO MY EYES

Friends new and old - worth more than gold
Instructors all sharing their wealth
Pope Barbara keeps smiling and shaking her head
As we all make an ash of our self
(repeat chorus)

Congratulations to NBCMS Recent Music Merit Award Winners

Colleen and Bob Whaling



Photo by Doug Reid

Sue Decker



Photo by Doug Reid

NBCMS Music Merit Awards by Doug Reid

In 2010, the Music Merit Awards will be awarded once per year with the application deadline being June 15,



Photo by Carolyn Hotte

The purpose of Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society (NBCMS) Music Merit Awards are to provide a monetary award to individual(s) demonstrating: outstanding achievement, ability, potential and/or contributions to the preservation, promotion and/or presentation of Bluegrass Music so that such individual(s) may further advance their musicality through the study of Bluegrass and/or Roots Acoustic Music at a venue of their choice. This helps to keep the NBCMS's mission by: **Promoting, preserving and presenting Bluegrass music for its members and the public.**

This years worthy recipients are Colleen and Bob Whaling, and Sue Decker.

Colleen and Bob chose a trip to the BC Bluegrass Workshop in Sorrento, British Columbia. Colleen will take harmony vocals with Jenny Lester (Hungry Hill), while Bob is signed up for the beginner clawhammer banjo with Ivan Rosenberg

(enter your own banjo joke here). They are looking forward to having a lot of fun and learning a lot, and would like to thank the NBCMS for their generosity. I'm looking forward to listening to their show and tell when they get back (or is that pick and grin).

Sue Decker is off to Nashville in November to attend the ResoSummit 2009. This is a long weekend of "all dobro, all the time" says Sue, which includes instruction, jams, and concerts. Rob Ickes is the organizer of the summit and Sue looks forward to the session that teaches them how to use the Dobro for writing songs. Sue says she "loves the Dobro, pure and simple", and looks forward to the fun and sharing with others at the summit, and learning to play up the neck.

Just a final note for all those who may want to apply for this award as it is changing next year. In 2010, the Music Merit Awards will be awarded once per year with the application deadline being June 15, instead of the present two times a year. The total yearly award amount still remains the same.

A Sorrento thank-you from Bob and Colleen Whaling

We would like to thank the NBCMS for the music merit award this year. Monies from this award were used to attend the BC Bluegrass Workshop in Sorrento, August 23-29.

Our trip started out on Friday with a beautiful trip through the mountains. On Saturday, however, Bob started feeling ill and the closer we got to Kamloops the worse he felt. After arriving in Kamloops and trying over the counter remedies, Bob's pain didn't go away and after a few sleepless and painful hours we called an ambulance and went to the hospital. After several tests it was confirmed it was appendicitis and surgery was needed. While waiting the nurse came in to say we had family waiting to see us. We both looked puzzled and then realized it was our extended family, our bluegrass family! Thank you to Ken, Carolyn and Kayla Hotte, Linda Saboe, Ron Mercer, Noel McNaughton and Les Eberhardt for coming to see us at the hospital. It meant a great deal to have your support and kind words. Thanks to Ken for his plan to come the next day and drive our motor home and us to Sorrento so we wouldn't be stuck in Kamloops and miss the workshop. We are so grateful for our friends. Four hours later surgery was successful and we were back in our motor home and we decided I would drive us to Sorrento. We arrived Sunday afternoon in time for our first introductory class!

Bob took beginning clawhammer banjo with Ivan Rosenberg. The clawhammer class was a lot of fun. Ivan has a great sense of humor and is a very talented teacher. Bob had a great time. He sends a special thank you to Ron Mercer for carrying his banjo to and from class and to Carolyn Hotte and Linda Saboe for carrying his guitar to the jams.

I took beginning harmony with Jenny Lester and Nadine Landry from Hungry Hill. Jenny and Nadine gave me lots of encouragement, confidence and the techniques to learn to sing harmony. I highly recommend Jenny and Nadine as teachers if you ever get the opportunity. It was a lot of fun!

It was a great week filled with afternoon workshops, great evening concerts and lots of jamming. Thank you again to NBCMS for this great learning experience!

Bob and Colleen Perform on Stage at Sorrento BC Bluegrass Workshop



Photo by Linda Saboe

"It was a great week... Thank you again to NBCMS for this great learning experience!"



Photo by Linda Saboe

NBCMS's Mr. Dress up??? By Doug Reid



Photo by Carolyn Hotte

If anyone has gone to any of the local bluegrass concerts, you may have noticed that one of the flashier musi-

cians is none other than Ron Mercer, the NBCMS's glorious workshop director. When asked how he got started in his "King of Bling" ways, he stated, "He's a showboat and always has been a showboat". He may not have both his oars in the water when it comes to his outfits, but he sure does look perdy in his getups. He also says, "Some people have talent and some people have looks. I went for the looks, which is my burden".

I asked him how he found all his outfits, to which he responded that he was in fact a great Internet shopper. He says it's hard to find full figure clothing otherwise. His biggest job is to get the pant legs shortened and the jackets big enough to cover his massive pipes (the pipes probably come from hammering away on that banjo. Hey Ronnie, try a sledgehammer next time. Heh! Heh! Heh!). Ron has been in a lot of show bands over the years, which he can attest to by showing off his long room full of outfits.

When it comes to playing instruments, he said, "You can learn to clawhammer banjo or buy some more sequins". I think he has had a little time for both of these passions, just check out his picture.



Photo by Terry Lawson



Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Photo by Doug Reid

"Some people have talent and some people have looks. I went for the looks, which is my burden".

Ron Mercer (K of B)



Photo by Carolyn Hotte





Down at the Jam . . . By Sue Decker

How long have you been coming to the NBCMS jam? What brings you here?

Photo by Doug Reid



Photo by Sue Decker

Rick, 6 months, guitar/
vocals
“the welcoming family-
like atmosphere and
there’s no judges”



Photo by Sue Decker

Olga, 3 years, listener
“The people, the music,
I just love to see seniors
get mobile.”



Photo by Sue Decker

Jeff, 6-7 years, banjo/
guitar/fiddle/vocals
“There’s no other place
for me to play this type
of music. It’s a treat to
be a part of.”



Photo by Sue Decker

Harry, first time listener,
plays in mandolin ensemble
“I’m a beginner at the blue-
grass, I like it.”

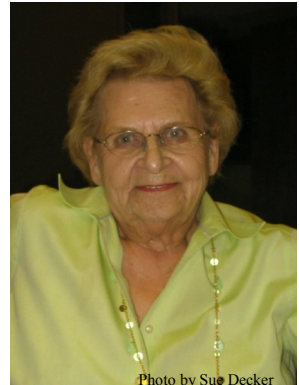


Photo by Sue Decker

Marion, 2-3 years, guitar/
vocals
“The people—friendly
group and I always learn
something.”

The Jam



Photo by Doug Reid

**The miracle is this - the more we share, the
more we have." - Leonard Nimoy**



Storm Strikes Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Festival by Sheila Hallett



Photo by Linda Saboe

If you were among the thousands of people at the Blueberry Bluegrass and Country

Music Society Festival on Saturday, August 1st, you experienced one of Mother Nature's humbling displays of force. If you weren't there, you've probably heard about it. Although we were spared some of the devastation which the Big Valley Jamboree experienced, few will argue that it was an awesome storm.

Record crowds were on hand to hear legend Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives perform at Blueberry that day from 4-5 p.m. and we were treated to a great set of music which warranted an encore. Marty could see the storm rolling in to the West, behind the backs of the crowd and asked the audience if we were really sure we wanted an encore--which we assured him that we were. They were just finishing the gospel song they'd chosen when the rain came and people started making their way to the pavilion to take cover. Within about four minutes, a plow wind hit the exhibition grounds registering in strength of up to 110 km per hour. Soon after came the marble-size hail which was blown sideways by the force of the wind. It is hard to describe the magnitude of the sound of the hail hitting the pavilion, but most people covered their ears for what seemed like 20 minutes of pounding.

As soon as Dan Ranger (head

of security for the festival) saw the green in the sky he tried to call 411 but couldn't get through. His thought had been to try and call Environment Canada to report what he was seeing, but communication was prevented. The system may have been overloaded with calls from neighboring areas which were experiencing golf-ball size hail. The power was out for about 1.5 hours, one hour of which was the scheduled supper break for the day.

The site took a beating from all the rain-especially the area to the South of the pavilion which was only to be used as overflow for parking-which turned out to be necessary because of the crowds. Thankfully the roof of the pavilion remained intact and only sprung a few leaks, but many motor homes on the site had their awnings ripped right off. All but one of the 16 portable washrooms were tipped over, spilling their contents. The tent structure that had been covering the Axe Music sound board lifted off and was blown across the site. The sound board got wet, but luckily was salvaged and dried using heat lamps overnight and it was ready for use again on Sunday.

Within a half hour of the storm the Stony Plain Town Manager, the Mayor, and the area MLA came on-site to check that everyone was alright and that the buildings had withstood the onslaught.

Over 60 cars had to be towed out of what looked like a lake/mud pit South of the pavilion.

Festival organizers had two four-wheel quads with boxes donated for their use during the three-day event by Cycle Works and these machines came in extremely handy for towing out the cars. About 25-30 motor homes enlisted the help of tow trucks to get them out of about a foot of water.

The crowd hunkering in the pavilion for the rest of the evening were treated to two acoustic performances: one by John Reischman and the Jaybirds and one by the Dixie Flyers, before the temporary stage (donated by ATCO to be used for kid's craft area) was ready to roll with performances by Dan Paisley & Southern Grass, Alecia Nugent and finally by Sierra Hull.

While many tents and jammers pulled up stakes for the evening, most returned on Sunday for a mainly rain-free day with great performances and many stories to share! The show capper was the closing act by Marty Stuart who proved what a class-act he is by performing a song he wrote about the storm. It made us all glad we had been there to experience his storytelling and his amazing talent.

While his heart and ours went out to the folks at Camrose who didn't fare nearly as well, we were all very mindful of how lucky we had been and how things could have turned to disaster quickly. For many years to come people will be talking about the 'year we got that big storm at Blueberry!'

"...a plow wind hit the exhibition grounds registering in strength of up to 110 km per hour. Soon after came the marble-size hail which was blown sideways ..."

Storm Strikes Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Festival (cont'd)



Photo by Claudia Bolli

“Over 60 cars had to be towed out of what looked like a lake/ mud pit South of the pavilion. About 25-30 motor homes enlisted the help of tow trucks to get them out of about a foot of water.”



Photo by Claudia Bolli

Where did You Read the Bluegrass Bulletin This Summer?



Mo Lefever, Rhonda Withnell, Kayla Hotte at Jeffrey's Café & Wine Bar
Photo by Linda Saboe



Alfie Myhre at Myhre's Music
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Colleen & Bob Whaling Linda Saboe, Justin Whaling, Ron Mercer, Noel McNaughton, Carolyn Hotte, Rick Diesbourg, Sue Decker, Jim Harrison and Audrey Ady. Photo by Sheila Hallett



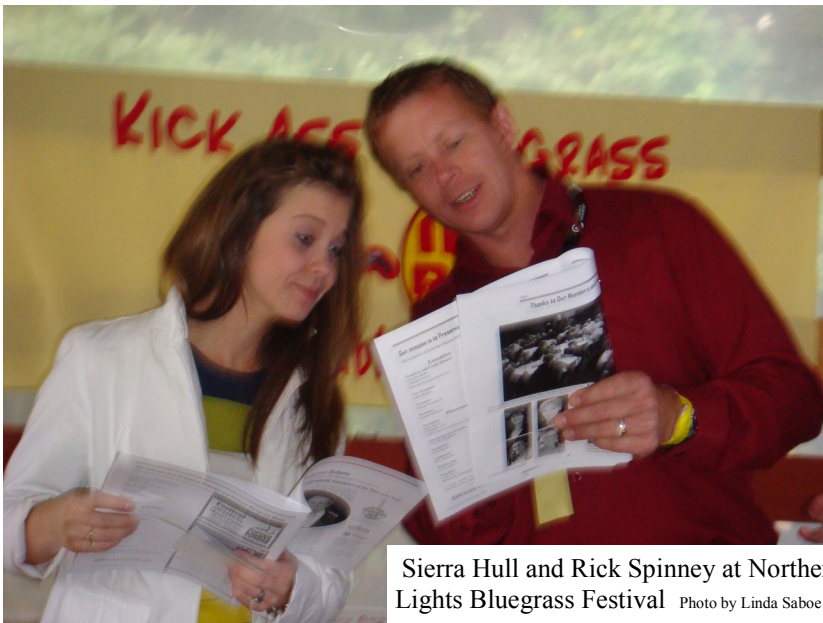
Chet and Saige Whiteside at Jim Storey's Cuban Rum Party
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Lenny Gallant and Dallas Petry at Boscombe's Hillbilly Jam
Photo by Linda Saboe



Where did You Read the Bluegrass Bulletin This Summer?



Sierra Hull and Rick Spinney at Northern Lights Bluegrass Festival Photo by Linda Saboe



Sue Decker at Edmonton's Folk Festival Photo by Carolyn Hotte



What's the difference between a fiddle player and a dog?

The dog knows when to stop scratching.



Robert Stein, Harvey Diduck and Ollie Machon at Vegreville's Pysanka Festival Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Ron Mercer and Les Eberhardt at Vegreville's Pysanka Festival Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Lydia Myhre at Myhre's Music Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Where did You Read the Bluegrass Bulletin This Summer?



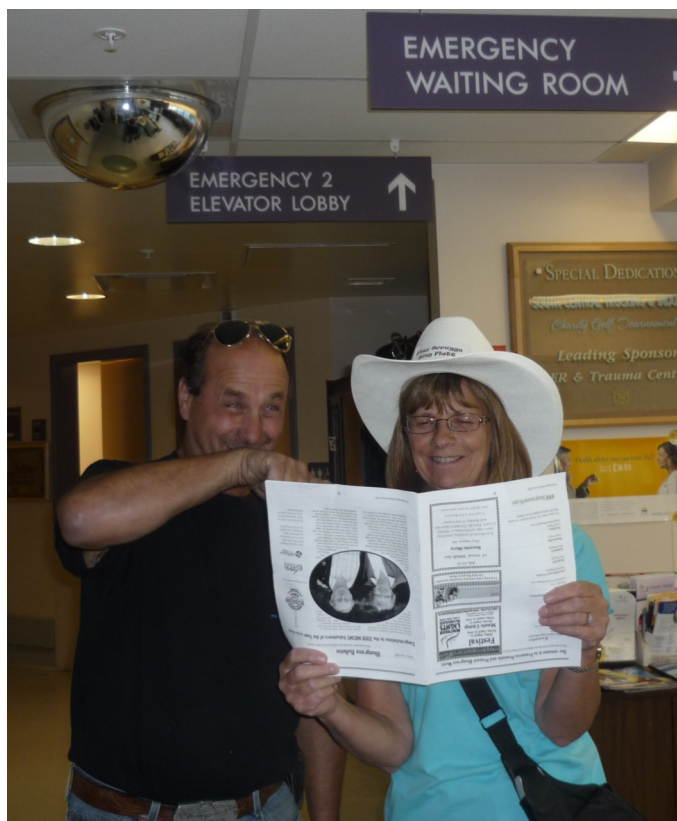
Phyllis May At NBCMS Canada Day Jam
Photo by Linda Saboe



Jim Harrison and Audrey Ady at Bob and Colleen Whaling's
Photo by Linda Saboe



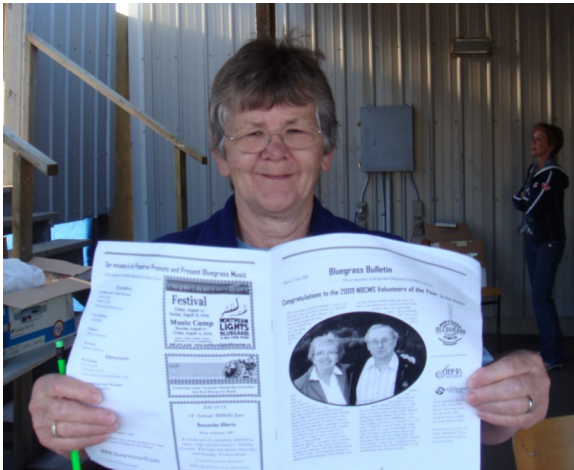
Floyd R. Young at the Northern Lights Bluegrass Festival
Photo by Linda Saboe



Ken Hotte and Colleen Whaling at the Royal Inland Hospital, Kamloops BC
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Where did You Read the Bluegrass Bulletin This Summer?



Lois Bouchard at Boscombe's Hillbilly Jam
Photo by Linda Saboe



Jennifer Bork and Carolyn Hotte at Northern Lights Bluegrass
Photo by Linda Saboe



Sheila Hallett and Rick Diesbourg at Bob and Colleen Whaling's.
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Noel McNaughton at Jim Storey's Cuban Rum Party
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Jim Storey at his Cuban Rum Party
Photo by Carolyn Hotte



Congratulations Noel – Winner of First Prize at Sorrento's Week One Song Writing Contest



Thank You Jim Harrison by Carolyn Hotte

“The club has recently received a donation of a 5-string banjo from Jim Harrison.”



Photo by Doug Reid

The club has recently received a donation of a 5-string banjo from Jim Harrison. Jim has been a

NBCMS supporter for many years. He and his partner Audrey Ady attend most of our events and volunteer when they can. You can see Jim’s smiling face almost every week in the jam circle playing his ‘Five’ (Gibson Mastertone RB3 Banjo).

Thank you Jim, your generous donation it is very much appreciated.

The “Harrison” (banjo) will be kept on hand for those who may want to try and play it. We also have a stand-up bass for members use at our regular jams.

If you want to use either of these instruments please ask any one of the executive and we would be glad to help you get it out.



Bob Whaling, NBCMS equipment director, accepts Jim’s donation. *Photo by Carolyn Hotte*



How many banjo players does it take to change a light bulb?

Three....one to change it, and two to complain that "Earl wouldn't a done it that-a-way."



Jim Harrison jamming at the NBCMS circle. *Photo by Carolyn Hotte*



How (not) to Jam by Ron Mercer



Always remember, you are the best musician in this circle and people came just to hear you.

Note Never invite anyone else into the jam!

Don't be shy; make absolutely sure you are playing loud enough that the singer doesn't drown you out.

Constantly tune your instrument during the song. Tuning is important!

On your turn, pick a song that nobody will know (your originals are great)

Never, never tell anyone the key you are playing in. Remember to throw in as many minor chords as you know, just to spruce up the tune a bit.

Keep up a steady line of chatter during the jam, as your comments & insights are so important.

Make sure you boo or laugh when someone flubs up. This will "learn" them to play better.

Try to vary your tempo while a song is in progress to see if the group is good enough to follow you.

The very best time to practice your hot licks or scales at full volume is whenever the singer is singing!

Make sure you have had enough liquor before coming to the jam. You actually play much better while intoxicated and you are soooo funny.

As soon as you finish your turn, leave this jam and run to another one! They need you there too.

Never, never tell anyone the key you are playing in.

Never invite anyone else into the jam!

Notes From the Editorial Team by Linda Saboe



The Foothills Bluegrass Music Society loved the June article "Why Volunteer" by Ron Pidskalny". It is wonderful to know that people across the province are reading the Bluegrass Bulletin. Thanks to Ron for agreeing to share

this excellent work and to the Calgary club for publishing this article in their fall newsletter.

***Ron Pidskalny author
"Why Volunteer"***



Photo by Carolyn Hotte

A major club event, the annual Bluegrass Workshop, will soon be here (October 2-4) send us your compliments and/or photos (lsaboe@telus.net) and be sure to stop by and thank the volunteers that make this fantastic event possible.

NBCMS volunteers plan, write, prepare and edit the Bluegrass Bulletin. Costs incurred for the June issue include: printing 500 copies \$393.75; mailing 300 copies includes 300 stamps \$371.10 and 345 envelopes \$62.97. Total cost \$828.42 and this is the expected cost for the fall edition.

On behalf of the newsletter team, thank you for all of your contributions and for providing us the opportunity to produce the newsletter.

The Traditional Bluegrass Microphone Technique by Kevin Jacobson (www.cavemusic.ca)



Photo by Claudia Bolli

As most bluegrass aficionados are aware, many bluegrass and old-time musicians prefer the single mike technique for sound reinforcement. This technique can work quite well, but musicians need to understand how to work the mike properly in order to achieve the best sound. With one mike, and therefore one channel in operation at the mixing board, the sound person can do little to modify the sound - it's up to the musicians to achieve a

good blend of instruments and voices. This can be difficult since the musicians can't hear exactly what the audience is hearing. The main performing advantages of the single mike technique are: the players get close together so they can hear and blend voices and instruments well, and it looks really cool as the musicians whiz around taking turns singing and playing instrumental breaks. This two-part article is intended to help people understand a little more about this technique. Part 1 talks briefly about the history and some technical details about microphones, and Part 2 will discuss proper microphone technique.

Part 1: History and Technical Stuff

Legend has it that way back before most of us were born, there weren't no iPods and there weren't no 'lektricity. Most music venues were designed with good acoustics, performances were

small, and musicians knew how to project their sound acoustically. The arrival of newfangled technology: radio broadcast and sound reinforcement in the 1920s, allowed performers to be heard by much larger audiences. The earliest sound systems were simple, using a single omnidirectional or figure eight microphone with one amplifier channel to pick up an entire band. Musicians adapted, moving around the mike as necessary. As it turns out, much of country and bluegrass music was developing at this particular time. Although multiple channels are now easily and cheaply available, traditionalists prefer to use a single mike.

The Microphone

The term "omni" microphone is often misused. Omnidirectional microphones pick up sound equally all around the mike, but this is not very good since the band usually clusters on one side of the mike facing the audience. Omni mikes would pick up the audience side also, and suffer very badly from feedback problems. Therefore, most mikes used today are directional, having a "cardioid" pickup pattern. They generally pick up sound within about a 120 degree range on one side of the mike, and reject sound on the other side. Popular mikes in the bluegrass world are the Audio-Technica AT4033 and the Shure KSM32. These are high-quality, high-sensitivity, large-diaphragm condenser mikes. They have very clear sound, but they do not have quite the same sound of the RCA 44A and 77B ribbon mikes that were often used at the Grand Ole Opry, WSM radio, and in early recordings.

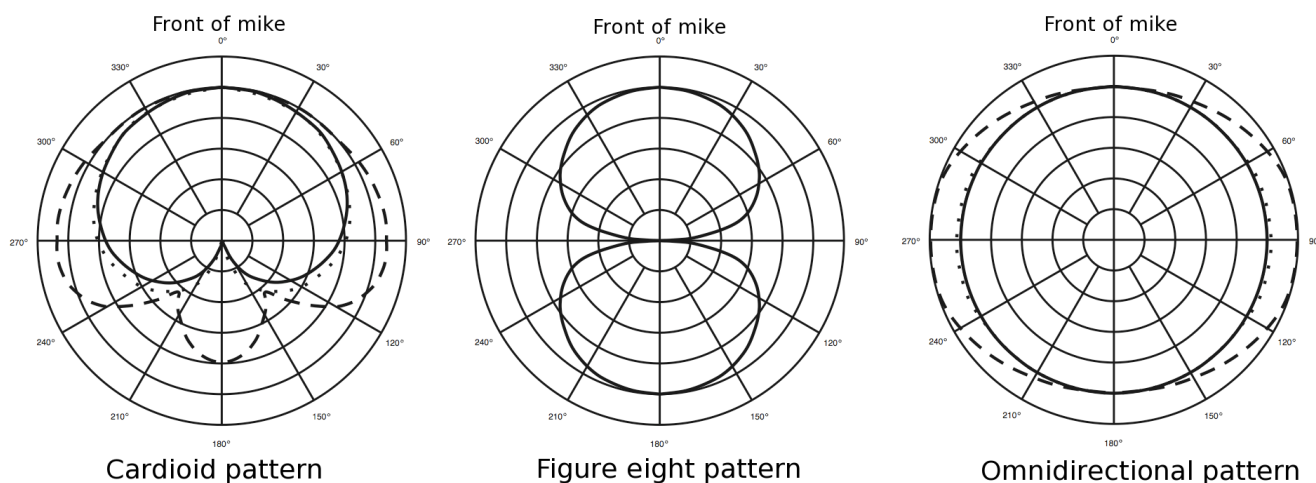


Figure 1: Cardioid, figure eight, and omnidirectional mike patterns. The solid line indicates the pickup "zone."

The Traditional Bluegrass Microphone Technique by Kevin Jacobson (www.cavemusic.ca) cont'd



RCA 44A and 77B Audio-Technica AT4033

Shure SM57

Figure 2: RCA 44A and 77B (ribbon mikes), the modern AT4033 (condenser) with shockmount, and the Shure SM57 (dynamic).

Dynamic, condenser, or ribbon mike? There's too much techie stuff required to explain the differences fully, but here is a summary. Dynamic mikes are very cheap, and immune to abuse (dropping them, swinging them through the air). Condenser and ribbon mikes are generally more expensive (although that has changed a lot recently), have much better sound, and are susceptible to damage. Also, condensers require "phantom power" (48 volt power sent from the mixing board) while dynamics and ribbons do not. Ribbons are the most expensive and the most delicate, so usually large-diaphragm cardioid (directional) condenser mikes are favoured for live sound. The condenser diaphragm is the part that converts the sound to an electrical signal, and a large one gives better low end response.

Microphone Characteristics

You probably already know that the closer you get to a mike, the louder it picks up. So you need to be fairly close to be heard. What you may not realize, is that proximity to the mike also affects the tone of the sound. Generally, the best sound is directly in front of the mike and about six to eighteen inches away from the mike. When you get too close, the mike starts to sound really boomy, and it can pick up "plosives" like "p," "b," etc., and that

can sound really bad amplified. You may also get distortion due to the high sensitivity, or you can suddenly get too loud and wake up the sound guy (and that's never a good thing). If you're too far from the mike, the sound gets really thin and tinny sounding, and the mike picks up more echoey room sound relative to the direct sound. Moving from the centre of the mike off to the side also changes the tonal quality somewhat. Mikes pick up footstomps on the stage, wind blowing through the mike's grill, and the entire acoustic space the band is in (not to mention DTTW's bottles tinkling, and any mumbling band members). Mikes should be mounted in a shock mount (that cage thing), and at outdoor festivals it's a good idea to use a windscreen. The quality of the acoustic surroundings is an often overlooked part of the sound. If the stage area is boxy and echoey sounding, that's what will get into the mike and amplified, and there will be big problems with feedback. The single mike technique is especially difficult to use in a bad acoustic space.

That's about enough for this instalment. Please tune in next time when I discuss microphone technique.



How many bluegrass musicians does it take to screw in a light bulb?

It doesn't matter, as long as they each get a turn.

OR

Two....one to change it, and the other to sing about how much he misses the old bulb.



How many guitar players does it take to change a light bulb?

Two....one to change it and the other to say "Hey, I can do that better!"

Carolyn Hotte looks at the future of Bluegrass and the NBCMS— Interview by Ron Pidskalny



How do you see the world of Bluegrass music evolving?

I'm hoping that Bluegrass music becomes more popular. While the traditional style of Bluegrass music will likely remain intact, the genre may evolve and become more contemporary. This sounds complex, but it's really quite simple – many new bands establish a unique style while still sounding traditional.

I listen to folk music radio and hear Bluegrass. When did Bluegrass become Folk?

I don't know. At one time, Bill Monroe would not play folk festivals – but Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs would. I guess Bill Monroe was more particular, though he came around eventually and played Bluegrass in the folk world.

How has the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society evolved over ten years?

The NBCMS has gotten bigger over the past 10 years. This means that the jam circle can get quite large at times. Fortunately, we have a big group of friendly people who are having fun and are helping each other out. We are also a busier club and we offer our members a lot. Everything we do, though, takes time – and we need volunteers to make these things happen.

What do you like about NBCMS jams?

I love the jams because we keep it bluegrass and we don't stray.

Don't you think we stray just a little bit?

Yes, maybe we do . . . but everyone has his or her own version of bluegrass. As long as we're jamming and we're having fun, I think we're doing fine.

How would you like to see the NBCMS evolve over the next five years?

I think one of the roles of the NBCMS should be to educate the world about traditional Bluegrass music. I hope that people will see our jams, workshops and other events as a friendly, safe environment where people can bring their kids and grandkids. Slow pitch will always be an important part of our club. It brings in a lot of beginners – and a number of these beginners have gone on to contribute a

lot towards keeping our club vibrant and successful. While some of the more advanced players might feel that this is not what they want to play, I think it will continue to be important to keep beginners coming in through our doors. All jammers are important, and the advanced players need to know that they have a very important role as well. The circle needs them to survive. The NBCMS started as a jamming club and jamming is still our major objective. At some point, I hope that someone else will come along and want to take over the leadership of the club. New and fresh ideas are always welcome.

So why are you “doing it all?”

Well . . . if I didn't do it, it probably wouldn't get done. (laughs) Some club members do more than others, but I feel that everyone does his or her fair share. Those who may be interested in taking a leadership role in our club should start by helping a member of the executive on a regular basis, in order to learn more about the different executive positions. Even if your goal is not to join the executive, this helps lighten the load for those who have accepted the responsibility of a position.

What is the NBCMS doing to bring younger Bluegrass musicians onto the executive?

I don't know. We're not doing a lot to get out and reach a younger crowd – and we don't have a lot of younger members. We do tend to see younger people at our workshops and we noticed that there were a lot of younger people attending the Sorrento Bluegrass Workshop and Festival in Salmon Arm, BC in August. However, bringing in a younger crowd may not be the answer to keeping a club alive, because even older members are not stepping forward to become involved in running the club. This issue is really about volunteering – it's not about age or club demographics.

My favourite band of all time is Alice Cooper. Now that we're all coming out of the closet, who influenced you in your formative years?

Deep Purple and Supertramp. Of course Bill Munroe influenced my Bluegrass side . . . and currently, my favourite group is Danny Paisley and the Southern Grass.

“I hope that people will see our jams, workshops and other events as a friendly, safe environment where people can bring their kids and grandkids.”





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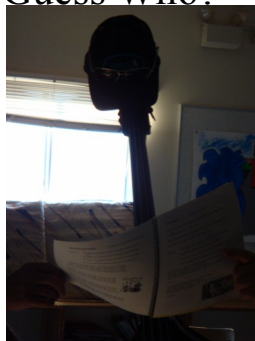
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Guess Who?



Ken Hote's Bass

HINT

How many upright bass players does it take to change a light bulb?
1...5...1...5...1...5...



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