



The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society

Bluegrass Newsletter

Spring 2015

Meet the 2015-2016 Board of Directors



The Annual General Meeting of the NBCMS was held on February 11, 2015. Elected as **President** was **Ron Mercer**. This is Ron's second term as President, having served in 2013-2014.



Kinley Miller, Ron Mercer, Steve Schroeter, Anna Somerville, Shawn Robinson, Leonard Swanson, Corinna Diamond, Jason Baldwin. Missing: Marc Ladouceur, Frank Omoe, Grant Miner, Marlene Thompson

Joining Ron on the Executive is **Vice President Leonard Swanson**. This is the multi-instrumentalist's first term on the Executive.

Jason Baldwin was elected as the **Treasurer**. The banjo playing neophyte is also a newcomer to the NBCMS Executive. Guitarist **Corrina Diamond** makes her initial appearance on the Executive filling the position of **Secretary**.

The four returning Directors are banjo and guitar playing **Kinley Miller** as **Director of Advertising and Membership**, along with multi-talented and supremely organized **Anna Somerville** as

Workshop Director (which also includes the Annual Winter Jam Camp and Anna's famous "Forced March"). **Shawn Robinson** (guitar, mandolin, banjo, etc.) returns as **NBCMS Webmaster Extraordinaire**. Mandolinist **Steve Schroeter** continues as **Equipment Director**.

Two new Directors were elected. The first is a very familiar face to anyone who has followed music of almost any genre across the

Alberta music scene. The amazingly talented and blessedly healthy **Marc Ladouceur** is the new **Concert Director**.

Elected as the **Director for the Newsletter** was mandolinist **Frank Omoe** who will share the position with multi-instrumentalist **Grant Miner** as **Co-Editors**.

Thank you very much to **Marlene Thompson** who just volunteered to be the Director of Front of the House.

Time to Renew Your Membership

- Renew at the Wed Jam
- Renew online at: www.bluegrassnorth.com
- Renew by mailing the enclosed form and fee
- Still only \$15 individual, \$25 couple or family

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Ronnie's Ramblin's by NBCMS President Ron Mercer



First of all, I would like to thank the NBCMS club for putting their trust in me as President. I looked back in my records and I officially joined this organization in 2007. I knew the founder, George Bayard, quite well as we played together for a few years before the club was formed. I have been blessed to make many really good friends since I started jamming on Wednesday nights. I have played with several bluegrass bands in the past 8 years that were formed with NBCMS members (Prairie Pilgrims, Woodbend, Ida Red, Crooked Creek, Cabin Fever, Hay City Rollers and Mountain Spirit).

But, enough about me. I want to talk about the legacy that the Hotte clan has left with the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society. Ken Hotte is a solid stand-up bass player and the greatest guy to laugh with. His mechanical mind can always figure out the best way to have fun and still get the job done. I think of Ken as the Will Rogers of our time with a life philosophy that says "Common sense ain't common" and "There are three kinds of men: the ones that learn by reading, the few who learn by observation and the rest of them that have to actually pee on the electric fence."

Matt Hotte is another gem. He plays bass, mandolin, banjo, guitar and fiddle with such precision and passion. He seems to me a quiet person by nature but beware of his ferocious attack when he solos. My brief time playing with him in "Ida Red" was humbling as his fiddle wove such beautiful, haunting back-up lines, I usually lost my concentration. It was better to listen to him than to play my part. He is constantly raising the bar for the rest of us musically.

Kayla Hotte has always been a good jammer in the circle with interesting song choices. She tried to teach me bluegrass fiddle but I flunked out (I guess

you actually have to practice). Graduating with a music pedigree from Grant MacEwan College, she is now a "learned" player and it certainly shows when she picks out her harmony parts. She has taken a slightly different path with her Rodeo Pals group but her choices of musicians are definitely the cream of bluegrass players and the circle improves with her in it.

Have I missed anyone? Oh yes, Carolyn. This dynamo guitar player & mother has driven the NBCMS with her passion from the moment she came on board in 1999. She has spear-headed so many new ideas, events, concerts and committees it would be hard to list them all. Her enthusiasm for bluegrass led many of us to follow her to Washington, Tennessee and North Carolina. I think her greatest accomplishment has been the extensive list of bands she has brought to Edmonton to perform for us. Rhonda Vincent, The Fabulous Stringbusters, Charlie Sizemore, Dale Ann Bradley, Special Consensus, Lonesome River Band, Michael Cleveland and The Spinney Brothers come to my mind right off the bat. Thank Carolyn for getting the best bluegrass musicians in the world to come to our door!

My vision for the club is to try to lure the more accomplished players back to the fold. The NBCMS has always been a "jamming" club. I have been fortunate enough to be included in a few of the high-powered (invite only) jams that occur secretly in our city. A select number of us actually all spend a weekend together at a bed and breakfast and the caliber of musicianship is truly inspiring. It is exhilarating to play at your best and not be afraid to try "jam-busters." I became the bluegrass musician I am now (which isn't that great) by being challenged to keep up and learn more fiddle tunes, not by having friends try to constantly accommodate me. Bringing our best local musicians back into our circle will help transform all of us.

First 2015 Executive Meeting and Goals by NBCMS President Ron Mercer



Your new executive had their first meeting to discuss the direction the NBCMS bluegrass club wants to try this year. It got a little heated in my cool basement at times but I am sure excited with some of our decisions.

Kinley (membership & merchandise director) showed us some samples

of the new clothing he had made: jackets, embroidered t-shirts & hats in many colors. Marc (entertainment director) suggested that we have a small inventory of these for sale at the upcoming Chris Jones concert. Come on out to the jam on Wednesday nights and see our new merchandise display.

The only position that was not filled on the NBCMS board was the "Front of House." We nominated Marlene Thompson and she will commence her duties this month. Welcome aboard! She is hoping to implement an actual coffee break in our jamming time for all of us to relax, chat and sip a beverage together in the evening.

After much discussion about ideas like slow pitch, junior jams and instrument instruction, we settled on this idea; **Bluegrass 101**. Local and very well respected singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and member of the Bix Mix Boys **Darcy Whiteside** will lead a 1 hour session every Wednesday, downstairs starting at 7:30. He will discuss items such as jam etiquette, bluegrass history, specific roles of instruments, what makes a song "bluegrass," and also welcome new members. **Darcy** will show new members (and veterans) how to maximize their bluegrass circle jamming experience. I believe all of us could have benefitted from this when we started.

In conjunction with Bluegrass 101, we decided to raise the musical bar at our jams by having one of the 10 local bands lead a jam once a month. It will work like this: the band will perform a ½ hour set on stage at 7 pm. Bluegrass 101 will start at 7:30. The band will introduce songs to the remaining folks at the circle and participate in the overall jamming experience. I can't wait to play with Edmon-ton's best bluegrass players!

The executive ran out of time to talk about more ideas, but these are tabled to our next meeting in April. I'll finish up by quoting a line from this Reno and Smiley tune: "I'll be gone, long gone." Look that one up, it's a good 'un.



Welcome to the new Newsletter by Frank Omoe and Grant Miner

As that famous bluegrass artist David Bowie once wrote, “Ch, Ch, Ch, Ch, Changes” (are under way). As you no doubt noted while reading the front page, there has been a significant changing of the guard on the NBCMS Executive and Board of Directors. Having Co-Editors of the NBCMS Newsletter is one of those changes. As any sane woman knows, it takes two men to do the job of a good woman and that is certainly true with producing the NBCMS Newsletter. While the previous two editors, Kayla Hotte and Linda Saboe, may not have had the biggest feet, they have left big shoes for us to try to fill. We only hope that our enthusiasm will make up for our lack of newsletter publishing experience. We will appreciate any help and suggestions that you, the membership, can make. After all, this newsletter is for you.



Frank spent four of the last six months in Arizona while Grant wintered on Vancouver Island. While both of us took part in the bluegrass scenes in those parts, we came to really appreciate the tremendous musical talent that exists in the Edmonton area, Northern Alberta region, and, fortunately, right within the NBCMS membership.

Our intention is to take a fresh approach regarding the content and regular features in the Newsletter. We think it is important that our members be kept informed about what's happening in bluegrass at the local, national and international level. Most important is the local bluegrass scene and the NBCMS. We will be promoting local bands and events. We will include a variety of informational articles to help members learn as much as possible about the history of bluegrass and relevant current events. We also have reached out to members, including major players in the local bluegrass community, to contribute articles.

The NBCMS' mission is to promote, preserve and present Bluegrass Music and that mission is what will drive our newsletter.

We welcome your input and feedback. Tell us what you like and what you think can be improved upon. To contact us, simply go to <http://www.bluegrassnorth.com>. Then click “Contact Us” and fill in the boxes. We look forward to hearing from you.



Greetings from the Past President by Carolyn Hotte

It has been a pleasure to be on the board for as long as I have (since 1999). There have been good times and stressful times but all in all I am proud of what the NBCMS has accomplished.

We have hosted some great jams, concerts and events along the way. I have met many wonderful people and it has been a joy to jam or chat with you all. Some great players have come

through our doors and some very passionate people wanting to learn bluegrass. I am sure this will continue because there is something about the music that is captivating and contagious. I love it. We have a great community and some amazing members. I thank you for all of your support over the years.

Change is good and it will be exciting to see what happens next. I wish every success to the newly elected

Executive. To Pat Sunduhl & Erin Kushniruk, thank you for your contribution to the NBCMS and best wishes with your future endeavors wherever they may lead.

I may not be on the board anymore but I still am available. See you in the 'Circle.'

Christmas Celebration 2015 with the Foggy Hogtown Boys by Carolyn Hotte

The Foggy Hogtown Boys from Toronto took to the stage for our Christmas Party on November 30, 2014 at our jamming home at Pleasantview Community Hall. It was a treat to hear them again as it was 2007 when they were last here for a concert and then instructed at our Fall Workshop. They were in fine form and, after the concert, jammed with us for about an hour. Another treat.

After that we had a perogy dinner cooked up by Pat and her volunteers. It was fantastic. The evening ended with more jamming. Fun was had by all and it was great to connect and reconnect with fellow members and their families. Thank you for coming out and sharing in our Christmas Celebration.



Photo thanks to Carolyn Hotte

Annual NBCMS Christmas Donation goes to Paws in Need by Carolyn Hotte

Each year at Christmas time the NBCMS makes a donation to a charity that they feel needs some extra support. This year, after many suggestions and a discussion, we decided on The Paws in Need Animal Rescue. They are a non-profit and help animals in need, rescuing them, getting

them medical attention, spaying, neutering, caring for and nursing them back to health and finding homes for them as needed. NBCMS President Carolyn Hotte presented the \$500 charitable donation cheque to Amanda, Event Coordinator of the Paws In Need Animal Rescue.



Photo thanks to Kinley Miller



Promoting the NBCMS at the Steep Canyon Rangers Concert by Shawn Robinson

We were invited to represent the local bluegrass scene at the Steep Canyon Rangers concert at the Myer Horowitz Theatre.

Jason Baldwin, Leonard Swanson and I set up the table, banner, and provided the new Jamming Tips pamphlets, NBCMS Banjo stickers, and the very popular NBCMS Guitar picks. We estimated that we spoke to about 25-30 bluegrass fans who ranged from past club members to closet banjo pickers to the fine folks who produce the Northern Lights Bluegrass festival in Saskatchewan to just plain music fans. We even met a woman who organizes her own Sunday picking parties in Camrose. One gentleman

was very interested in the guitar picks, and when asked if he played music, he answered with a big smile, "Yes! I play the radio!" One of our local Bluegrass radio personalities was also in attendance: Cousin Darcy from CJSR's Prairie Pickin' (and The Bix Mix Boys).

I felt that it was a great opportunity to promote the club, with a prominent table in the theatre lobby, right between the merchandise table and the bar!

One of the most common questions was, "What level of player do you need to be to come to the jam?" There are lots of people who are just starting out, or have

just bought instruments. We also promoted the NBCMS Fall workshop to folks.



Bluegrass disciples Jason Baldwin & Shawn Robinson spreading the word

Photo by Leonard Swanson

Suncor Supports Bluegrass and the NBCMS by Frank Omoe

The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society is fortunate to receive financial support from the business community. We are delighted to extend a grateful thank you to Suncor Energy Inc for a donation of \$750, as part of the "**SunCares Community Service Volunteering Grant**" program.

Thank you to NBCMS club member, **Howie Bergeron**, for his part in helping the NBCMS secure this most helpful contribution.

NBCMS Fall Workshop by Anna Somerville

This year at the AGM, I asked to continue as Workshop Director for another year. I am looking forward to organizing this year's **Acoustic Music Workshop** in October as well as the **2016 Winter Jam Camp**. Ron Mercer and I have teamed up to scout out a fantastic workshop line up for 2015. We are promising to inspire you into joining us again **October 16 – 18** at Camp He Ho Ha. Plan to be there!

Everybody loves bluegrass music. Some just don't realize it yet.

Winter Jam Camp - a Musical Smorgasbord by Anna Sommerville

The Winter Jam Camp was just what 38 of us needed in the middle of January. We spent the weekend hidden away underneath the cold and snow at Camp He Ho Ha. There was lots of good food and we were warm and comfortable while enjoying the musical opportunities as they presented themselves. The best part about jam camp is the freedom you have to wander around and join in where you find inspiration. There were enough musical styles again this year to meet everyone's jamming needs. I brought band aides by the box load to assist

jammers who were not ready to quit even if their fingers were. What goes on at jam camp is supposed to stay at jam camp but I have to tell you, there was some fun stuff taking place. This year about 15 % of those attending were first timers and I think they will be regulars in the future. I saw all kinds of music happening: Bluegrass, Country, Swing and Old Time...an acoustic music smorgasbord. I'm inspired by the creativity of our community and would be hard pressed to find a friendlier and more welcoming group of people. If you were at the

Jam Camp you know what I'm talking about...it was a great weekend all around.



Anna gets Augie Hangartner and Leonard Swanson's attention.

My First Winter Jam Camp by Jason Baldwin

As a new musician, playing seriously for less than a year, I was a bit intimidated about spending a weekend playing with lots of very talented and experienced musicians. This concern was completely misplaced. Although I think all musicians of all levels suffer from self consciousness, I really believe the only way to learn how to play an instrument with other people is to play the instrument with other people.

In that regard the jam camp is a perfect environment and I strongly encourage one and all to attend in the future. The amount of positive feedback was very encouraging and quite unexpected.

I had set modest goals for myself and exceeded them by the end of the weekend. In hindsight this isn't so surprising. I was able to get perhaps 30 or so hours of jamming in over the

weekend. This is the equivalent to about 15 weeks of Wednesday night jams and is a huge opportunity to practice, improve and enjoy your music.

In addition to the tons and tons of jamming, there was a band scramble which felt much less terrifying as it was my second (the first being at the Fall Workshop). I also took part in an impromptu banjo lesson with two other new players put on by the friendly and talented Ron Mercer. On Sunday there was an open stage with consistently great music.

My only regret was that I spent most of the weekend playing with people who I already knew. There were so many great musicians from all over Alberta. I really should have tried jam with more of them. There is always next year!



Jason Baldwin, Ramblin' Ron Mercer, Don Kupidy, Corinna Diamond and Noel McNaughton's bald head at Winter Jam.

NBCMS presents Chris Jones and the Night Drivers!

On Friday, April 17, the NBCMS will host **Chris Jones and the Night Drivers**. Doors open at 7:00 pm at the Royal Glenora Club, 11160 River Valley Road in Edmonton. The concert begins at 7:30. Singer, songwriter, guitarist and, by listening to his show on Sirius/XM, **Chris Jones** is one of the most widely heard voices in Bluegrass Music. **The Night Drivers** are a fantastic band, featuring ace mandolinist Mark Stoffel.



The parking is free and tickets are \$20 for NBCMS members and \$25 for non-members. Tickets are available at www.bluegrassnorth.com, at the Weekly Jam at Pleasantview Hall, at Myhre's Music, or at the door.

NBCMS Weekly Wednesday Jam Session

From 7:00 to 10:00 pm. every Wednesday night, the NBCMS hosts an acoustic bluegrass jam at Pleasantview Community Hall, 10860 - 57 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta. Musicians (the pickers) of all abilities and listeners (the grinners) are most welcome. A donation of \$2.00 for an NBCMS member and \$3.00 for a non-member is requested at the door (but no one is ever turned away because they can't pay). Complimentary coffee is provided.

Casino Thank You by Terry Ruddy (Casino Chairperson)

I just want to say a big thank you to all who volunteered for the December Casino. Thanks to you, the NBCMS should receive close to \$80,000. More about the Casino in the next Newsletter.

"Grassified" Ads

For Sale: One excellent condition Yorkville Sound-200 Watt Keyboard Amp. For further details contact Henry Harks at henkh@shaw.ca or call (780) 459-2999

Myhre's Music
8735 - 118 Ave. Edmonton, Alberta T5B 0T2
(780) 477 - 1586
10% of all Non-Sale Accessories

Local Bluegrass Bands by Frank Omoe

According to “Prez, Ramblin’ Ronnie Mercer,” as of press time, there are ten local bands who are dedicated to playing bluegrass music (OK, so some of their songs may be a bit “grassified up” to be bluegrass but they still count). All of them have at least one member who belongs to the NBCMS. Most of the bands have web pages so please check them out to learn more about our very own Northern Alberta bands. The following is a list of the bands, in alphabetical order :

Amerada Road website: ameradaroad.com

Back Porch Swing website: backporchswing.ca

The Bix Mix Boys website: the bixmixboys.ca

Hay City Rollers website: haycityrollers.com

High Point Bluegrass Band contact: Larry Seuter (780) 980-8282 or pounds @explornet.com

Kayla Hotte and her Rodeo Pals website: therodeopals.com

Long Way Home contact: Terry Ruddy & (780) 244-4861 or TeePeeR@shaw.ca

Mountain Spirit contact: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Mountain-Spirit/487844594605733>

Up The Creek contact :Ron Woytiuk (780) 470-0234 ronpeggywoytiuk@gmail.com

Whitemud Drive contact: Clem Bray (780) 465-5611 cbray@telusplanet.net

It is our intention to feature a few of the local bands in each of the club’s newsletters over the next year. This coverage will give our membership, especially members who are new to the NBCMS, a great opportunity to learn more about the bluegrass community in the greater Edmonton area.

For this edition we have focused on two of the longer standing local bands, **Back Porch Swing** and **The Bix Mix Boys**. Please continue to read to learn more about these two bands.....





Back in 2003 Jim and Penny Malberg were co-hosting an Open Mike session after Jim convinced Penny to come out to give it a try. It went well and they decided to head for the studio to cut a demo. Shortly after they were joined in the studio by Kevin Jacobson. Then Cam Neufeld joined the group. What followed was the creation of a new band called, **Back Porch Swing**, a successful and entertaining Northern Alberta band.

Jim describes the band's style as acoustic music but really it is a swing band that plays musical styles that range from old time jug band bluegrass to covers of good old rock & roll....played with Back Porch Swing's flair and touch. Their musical influences include Doc Watson, David Grisman, Flatt & Scruggs and even David Bromberg. The band does not want to be limited in their style!

I recently interviewed Jim for this article and we discussed their song writing. Jim told me the following inspirational story, ***"We were lucky to participate in a week-long horseback/camping expedition in the mountains near Pincher Creek. One of our guides was an 83 year old gentleman who was an authentic cowboy from his head to boots, complete with the large western belt buckle and moustache. He got up each day at 4:30 AM to look after the horses and he made the week very memorable. The experience led to the writing of one of our original songs, "Close Enough To Heaven." Unfortunately, this gentleman passed away the following year. I was surprised and honoured when his family called me to ask if they could play this song at his funeral"***. (Editor note - In my humble opinion this is exactly what song writing is all about- meaningful stories with heart).

Here are the band members :

Jim Malmberg—vocals, mandolin, guitar
 Penny Malmberg—vocals, guitar, mandolin
 Cam Neufeld—violin
 Kevin Jacobson—bass

Back Porch Swing has played at various venues and festivals over the past few years. They have also been instructors at the NBCMS' Fall Workshop. In 2015 they are scheduled to play at events such as the "North Country Fair" in Driftpile, AB and the "Sasquach Gathering" in Rangeton, AB.

The band has cut three CDs, including their most recent CD, "Back Porch Swing LIVE." Please check out their website for more information, www.backporchswing.ca.

Article and Interview by Grant Miner



It was at an NBCMS Wednesday Jam in 2007 when Darcy Whiteside and Jim Storey (one of the NBCMS' co-founders) met Logan Sarchfield. The trio added Matt Hotte and **The Bix Mix Boys** were born. Named as an acronym for the biscuit mixture made by the Martha White Company (sponsor of the Flatt and Scruggs Radio and TV Hours), **The Bix Mix Boys'** present line up features Darcy Whiteside (Banjo & Vocals), Logan Sarchfield (Guitar & Vocals), Terry Nadasdi (Mandolin, Fiddle, Guitar & Vocals), Jim Storey (Bass) and their newest member, Tony Michael (Fiddle). Martha White was also the inspiration for the name of that great band Hot Rize (the yeast in the biscuit mix) and now sponsors Rhonda Vincent. If you're reading this, Martha, how about some dough (of the cash variety) for **The Bix Mix Boys**?

With a distinctive hard driving bluegrass sound influenced by such wide ranging artists as Mississippi John Hurt, Vassar Clements, Joe Venuti, Flatt & Scruggs, Jake Peters, Bill Monroe, and Prince, **The Bix Mix Boys** bring a unique Canadian interpretation of the bluegrass genre, whether performing original songs about Alberta and Canada (such as *The Albertan* and *Grass Could Not Be Greener*) or songs by well known Canadian and American artists.

During our conversation about the band, Darcy told me that, ***"We are all music nerds. We just really enjoy music and we listen to a lot of music from all over the map. There is an amazing degree of musical knowledge among the guys and we have a tremendous amount of respect for each other's musical abilities. Some of the most fun we have is at Sunday night rehearsals. I look forward to that all week."***

The Bix Mix Boys were some of the original instructors at the first Fall Workshop before it was even held at Camp He Ho Ha. They've played all over Western Canada at such events as The Blueberry, Shady Grove, Rombs, and Coombs Festivals. The boys have even played for weddings where one of the more unusual requests was for Fred Eaglesmith's *Wilder Than Her* (the first dance of the new bride and groom). On April 11, they will be performing at the Saturday Night House Concert Series in Ron Mercer's amazing basement. Tickets may still be available.

One of their favourite original songs to perform is Terry Nadasdi's *Grass Could Not Be Greener*. A popular request is always *Dance With Me Molly*. You can pick up a copy of their self titled CD (produced by Eric Uglum) and find out more about the band by checking out their website: www.thebixmixboys.ca

Article and Interview by Frank Omoe

Wood, Steel and Strings by Grant Miner

HISTORY OF THE 5 STRING BANJO

The history of the banjo in North America is extensive. However I decided to provide you with a bit of background, some of differences in banjo construction, and some information on the founders of this quiet and very subtle instrument!

The origin of today's banjo can be traced back to more primitive instruments from West Africa. These instruments were made using animal skin for the drum-like surface, a gourd for the body, and fretless neck. Banjos with fingerboards and tuning pegs were believed to be from the Caribbean in the 17th century. The first mention of the banjo in the American colonies came in 1754 when it was called a "banjer" in a Maryland newspaper. Of course it is still referred to as a banjer or banjar today in many circles.

The 5 string banjo became popular thanks to Joel Walker Sweeney who was a minstrel performer from Virginia. Sweeney's banjo, as played in the 1830's, had a sound box (like a drum) and included 4 full length strings and a shorter 5th string. At this time the banjo was generally

played using the claw hammer or frailing style of playing, and the banjo had an open back. Many players still use this style to generate that old-time sound.

The bluegrass banjo sound was achieved by using the right hand to play rolls (eighth notes) and by playing drone notes using the shorter 5th string. Earl Scruggs (1924-2014) developed the 3 finger picking style and it was first aired on the Grand Ole Opry in 1945. Scruggs is generally regarded as the father of the bluegrass style of banjo playing. His three finger picking with his right hand became known as the "Scruggs style."

Pete Seeger (1919-2014) invented the long neck 5 string banjo which became known as the "Seeger style banjo" (I owned a cheap version of this style of banjo during my late teens. I sold it at a garage sale, hmm...). Bela Fleck has taken the banjo into new areas through his innovative and superb technical playing styles. In addition to his solo work and playing with his own band, "The Flecktones," Fleck often plays with "new grass" or "progressive grass" bands.



Like, what is the least often heard sentence in the English language? That would be: "Say, isn't that the banjo player's Porsche parked outside?"

- Jackson Browne

Today's 5 string banjo, when played in the traditional bluegrass style, provides a band with lots of drive. Even at a bluegrass jam, like the Club's circle, you can often hear the jam's sound being lifted through the sound of a solid banjo break.

In the future Newsletters we plan to provide history on the other instruments traditionally used in bluegrass.

(References : Music Folk (St Louis, MO), Wikipedia)

Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys by Jim Storey

Bill Monroe and Muhammad Ali were born within a few miles of each other. It must be something in the water that produces alpha males. Bill Monroe loved to gamble, and would bet on just about anything. Bill Monroe was a loner, and never had a real friend his entire life. Bill Monroe got mandolin lessons from a classically trained mandolinist who worked on his dad's farm.

A history of Mr. Bill's long career and personal life, plus a history of the development of bluegrass music even before it's creation, are the subject of a 6 part documentary - around 6 hours of the structured ramblings of Butch Robins can be found online at <http://mozart.radford.edu/amc/?p=1149>

Butch Robins worked for Bill Monroe as a banjo player in the Blue Grass Boys at least two times - first in a short lived stint straight out of high school, and then again from 1977 'til 1981 and then gained more insight into the man and his music in the later stages of Bill's life. Butch's life has not been without its demons and mental health issues, drug abuse etc. but he shoots from the hip with his version of reality, and has a real great sense of what bluegrass music is all about.

This series is a must see for anyone interested in bluegrass music and Bill Monroe. Take the

time to watch the series and to get a better feeling and knowledge for the music and the Big Mon.

Speaking of Bill Monroe, there are some great stories out there about Bill. One goes that The Blue Grass Boys had played a show in one town, and were heading overnight to a job in another town. All the boys were sleeping, including Bill - with his hat over his eyes - sitting in the front passenger's seat (his usual place in the converted airport limo). The driver was the youngest member of the band (probably the bass player). As they came to a red light in the next town early in the morning, the limo stalled, and the young driver couldn't get it started. Try as he might, the car would not fire up. A driver in the car behind them started honking as the light turned green and wouldn't stop honking. This woke Bill and the boys up. Calmly, Bill got out of the limo, walked back to the vehicle with the honking horn, and tapped on the driver's window. When the driver rolled down the window, Bill said, "If you don't mind going up there and helping that young fellow get that car started, I don't mind staying here and honking your horn for you."

I received an email a few weeks ago (I don't remember who from - probably Ron Mercer) that asked if we would be interested

in learning a new song. The idea was submitted by Leonard Swanson, and, being a dobro player, he suggested a Josh Graves tune entitled "**Little Burma Through The Bayou.**" The email also came with an attachment of an mp3 of the instrumental. I thought "this is great" and promptly learned the tune. To my surprise, at the next Wednesday night jam, lots of people had mastered it. What a good idea. Maybe we should learn a new song a month or something. Keeps the old mind working. Thanks Leonard for a great idea.

I also want to talk about a wonderful CD that came out in the fall. I pre-ordered it I think in September, and was blown away when it came in the mail. Everyone has probably heard of it by now, as it won a Grammy as the best bluegrass CD of 2014. The album is self titled '**The Earls of Leicester**' (pronounced 'Earls of Lester') and is a collection of classic songs by Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs & the Foggy Mountain Boys. The band consists of Jerry Douglas (dobro - who thought up the project), Charlie Cushman (banjo), Shawn Camp (lead vocals and guitar - one of my favourite song writers), Tim O'Brien (mandolin), Barry Bales (bass) and Johnny Warren (fiddle).

..continued on next page

Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys continued

Johnny Warren is the son of Paul Warren, long time fiddle player for Flatt & Scruggs & the Foggy Mountain Boys. A super band playing some super music. Try not to miss this one, folks. (Rounder Records #11661-35772-02).



Jim Storey plays bass for the Bix Mix Boys.

Please try to catch Darcy Whiteside (Cousin Darcy) and myself, Jim Storey (Sunny Jim) on the air every Thursday night from 7:06 pm 'til 8:00 pm on 'Prairie Pickin' (CJSR's longest continually running radio show).

It's an hour of the best bluegrass music we can find on CJSR 88.5 FM or streaming live on the old inter-web at www.cjsr.com

Bluegrass Instrument Instruction

Are you learning a new instrument?
Are you looking to get to the next level of playing?

Learn to play better bluegrass with help from these local musicians who are willing to give private lessons (unrelated to the NBCMS):

Jim Storey	stand-up bass, flatpicking guitar	(780) 474-6033
Marc Ladouceur	mandolin, guitar	(780) 221-3464
Ron Mercer	banjo	(780) 488-5256
Kayla Hotte	voice, fiddle, rhythm guitar	(780) 940-3375
Larry Seuter	dobro, steel guitar	(780) 988-8282
Troy Gates	fiddle	(780) 998-4817
Leonard Swanson	dobro	(780) 436-1998
Mike Bunting	mandolin, guitar	(780) 952-6820



If you know of any other teachers who wish to have their name added to the list, please contact Frank Omoe at omoe@shaw.ca.

The NBCMS does not sponsor or endorse these lessons nor does the NBCMS accept any responsibility if you are not satisfied with the lessons or if still can't play your instrument following your lessons.

Inside the Vault by Frank Omoe

What a treasure we have in the Library located upstairs at Pleasantview Hall! There are dozens of CD's, lots of DVDs, and many instructional books on every bluegrass instrument and the voice. Whether you are a "picker" or a "grinner," I'm sure you could find something that you like. There are sign out sheets in a binder in the Library. Just remember to put the CD or DVD back in the case when you return it.

In each issue of the Newsletter, I will feature items that are in the Library. They are just waiting for someone like you or me to take them home.

Bill Monroe - The Legend Lives On CD

This Golden Stars boxed set released in 2005 features 42 of Mr. Monroe's classics. It is a "must-listen" for someone new to bluegrass. I found it very interesting to hear the earliest versions of what would become bluegrass standards. *Kentucky Waltz* features an accordion, an instrument that was in the Blue Grass Boys for one recording session in 1945. The version of *Blue Moon of Kentucky* is a slow waltz that must have been recorded pre-Elvis Presley's two part release of 1954 which Monroe would later adopt.

In this issue, I'll tell you about a 3 CD set called *Bill Monroe—The Legend Lives On*.

I'll give you my take on the 2005 first CD by the Grascals.

Being an aspiring singer, I picked up an instructional double CD entitled *How to Sing Harmony the Natural Way*.

Lastly, I watched a DVD entitled *The Best of Bluegrass Gospel*.

What you'll read are just my opinions so make sure you take them with a grain of salt. I'd love to hear what you think about them.

The 3 CD set showcases many versions of the Blue Grass Boys playing well known songs such as *Uncle Pen*, *Footprints in the Snow*, and *In the Pines*. There are also lesser known ones such as *My Little Georgia Rose*, *Wicked Path of Sin*, and *When You Are Lonely*.

Unfortunately only four tunes (*Blue Grass Special*, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, *Bluegrass Stomp*, and *Rawhide*) grace the set. Liner notes would also have been very helpful. Nonetheless, a great listen!



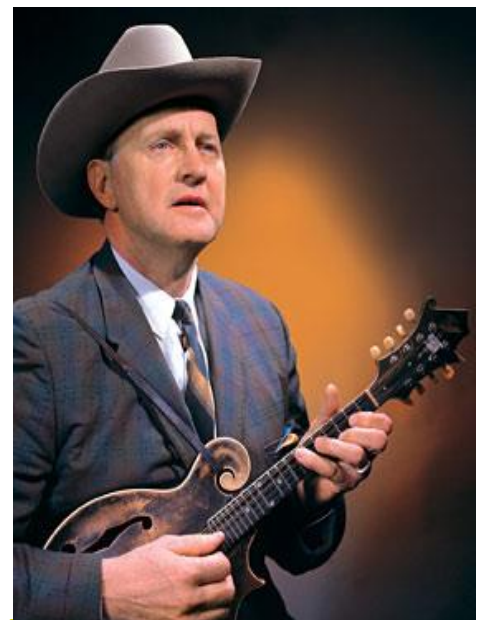
A peek inside "The Vault" looking at the Instructional Wall

"I'm a farmer with a mandolin and a high tenor voice"

"Bluegrass is wonderful music.

I'm glad I originated it."

Bill Monroe



The Grascals CD

The Grascals blew the doors off the bluegrass world with their debut 2005 Rounder release. The 13 song 33 minute disc mixed traditional tunes like *Sally Goodin* and *Sweet By and By* with a funky arrangement of Elvis' *Viva Las Vegas* (featuring Dolly Parton). A snare drum was used in *Where Corn Don't Grow*.

My personal favourites were the original song *Mourning Dove* and tune *Bevans Lake Crossing*. Not hard to see why The Grascals have become so popular. It's a terrific CD by a great band.



The Best of Bluegrass Gospel DVD

Bluegrass music combines great musicianship with superb vocals. It is hard to find better examples of three and four part harmony than in Bluegrass Gospel. A Man-do-Lin production, this 17 song DVD showcases some great harmony. As Bill Monroe is called the "Father of Bluegrass," The Lewis Family has been termed

The Easy Way to Learn Harmony Singing By Ear

Someone once said, "The world is made up of two kinds of people: Ukrainians and those who want to be Ukrainians." Maybe it was NBCMS member and mando player Gene Zwozdesky who said it. I can't remember. I'd word it just a bit differently. I think the world is made up of those who can sing (really) and those of us who *think* we can sing. Why is it that what sounds so good in the shower can peel paint off walls in public? And singing harmony? It sounds so *easy* when done right and so *awful* when done wrong. Fear not, dear fellow vocally challenged, this two CD set is here to help. Keith Little, Sue Thompson and Don Share have put together a great program on how to sing harmony without having to be able to read music. CD1, *Harmony Above the Melody*, has 20 tracks focusing on Quick-Start Beginning Harmony Skills, How to Find High Harmony Notes, Fig-

"The First Family of Bluegrass Gospel." They didn't disappoint, especially in *Over in the Glory Land*. The Larry Stephenson Band really impressed me in *Light at the River*. Steve Hitchcock and Ronnie Reno sang a clever version of *Keep on the Sunny Side* by singing that chorus while singing verses from *Life is Like a Mountain Railway* and *I Saw The Light*. Claire Lynch, Charlie Sizemore, Lou Reid and

The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society

uring Out High Harmony to a Song, and High Harmony Practice Songs (*All the Good Times Are Past and Gone*, *Ashes of Love*, *Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia*). CD 2, *Harmony Below the Melody*, starts with a Basic Skill Review for Low Harmony, followed by How to Find Low Harmony Notes, Figuring Out, and Low Harmony Practice Songs (the same three as on CD 1). Now, don't get the idea that simply listening to this CD and singing along one time will make one the perfect harmony singer. Is anything that easy? This CD set is a great start, however. It's something I will be taking out of the Library and reviewing on a regular basis.



Carolina plus four other groups are also on the 49 minute DVD. Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver performed four a capella songs in beautiful four part harmony that was simply spine tingling. While not everyone may agree with the lyrics in some of the songs, there can be no disagreement about the incredible harmony and talent of the performers.

BLUEGRASS ARTISTS - PAST & PRESENT by Grant Miner

Vassar Clements



Vassar Clements passed away on Aug 16, 2005 but during his lifetime he left a huge imprint on bluegrass music. Here are some highlights of his life.

Clements grew up in Kissimmee, Florida. He taught himself to play the fiddle at age 7. He did not read music and claimed that he "played what he heard," often by listening to the Grand Ole Opry. Clements was also influenced by the swing style of music played by the big band greats of the time. While still in his teens he met Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys in Florida. In 1949, at age 21, Clements travelled by bus to audition for the Bluegrass Boys with barely a nickel in his pocket. Fortunately he was successful and remained with Monroe's band for 7 years. As Clements evolved he became known as a country music pioneer with an inventive fiddle style.

During his career he played with bluegrass greats such as Jim & Jesse & the Virginia Boys, John Hartford, Norman Blake, and Earl Scruggs. Clement played on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 1972 award winning album, "Will The Circle Be Unbroken." In fact he played with practically every great bluegrass musician at one time or another. He also crossed over at times to play with the performers such as the Grateful Dead, Jimmy Buffett, Linda Ronstadt and Paul McCartney.

Vassar Clements became known as the "Father of Hillbilly Jazz." Hillbilly Jazz was the term Clements used to describe "Newgrass." His contributions included improvisational playing that blended bluegrass with swing and jazz. He played on over 200 albums and won numerous awards. For example he won a Grammy in 2005 (the year of his death) for Best Country Musical Performance for "Earl's Breakdown" by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, along with Earl Scruggs, Randy Scruggs and Jerry Douglas.

I did some digging around for some samples of Clements' playing. I found one where he is playing with the likes of John Hartford and Tony Rice (Google Youtube Vassar Clements Kissimmee Kid). Enjoy!

Grant Miner will be writing a regular column featuring major bluegrass artists, from the pioneers to the newest players on the scene.



Upcoming Concerts and Festivals in Alberta

April 11 **The Bix Mix Boys** Details on page 11.

April 17 **Chris Jones and the Night Drivers** Details on page 8

May 8-9 East Coulee Spring Fest (Drumheller/East Coulee)

May 15-17 Radway Festival of the Stars

June 19-20 Killam Green Grass Bonanza

June 19-July 1 The Works Festival (Edmonton)

July 17-19 South Country Fair (Fort MacLeod)

July 23-26 Calgary Folk Festival

July 24-26 Sasquatch Gathering (Rangeton Park)

July 31-Aug 2 Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Festival (Stony Plain)

July 31-Aug 2 Big Valley Jamboree (Camrose)

August 1-3 Canmore Folk Festival

August 7-10 Edmonton Folk Festival

August 14-16 Shady Grove Bluegrass Festival (Nanton)

August 15-16 Come By The Hills Music Festival (Wainwright)

October 22 Central Music Fest (Red Deer) features Claire Lynch

*Please note that at press time, nothing official had been lined up for the monthly Local Bluegrass Band Concert and Jam Lead. Please look for announcements through a Bluegrass Bulletin.

Workshops and Camps

June 14-20 Steve Kaufman's Acoustic Music Kamp (Maryville, Tennessee)

July 5-11 Guitar Camp (Manning, Alberta)

July 19-23 Camp Calvin Week 1 July 25-29 Camp Calvin Week 2 (St. Edouard, Alberta)

July 26-31 Acoustic Music Camp (Hillspring, Alberta)

August 10-14 Northern Lights Bluegrass & Old Time Camp (Nesslin Lake, Saskatchewan)

August 16-21 or 23-28 Nimblefingers Bluegrass & Old Time Camp (Sorrento, British Columbia)

October 16-18 NBCMS Fall Workshop (Camp He Ho Ha)

November 13-16 ResoSummit –Dobro only (Nashville, Tennessee)

**The Mission of the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society
is to promote, preserve and present Bluegrass Music
Visit our Website at www.bluegrassnorth.com**