



The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society

Bluegrass Newsletter

Spring 2016

Here is your New Executive !



Kinley Miller, Leonard Swanson, Ron Mercer, Sheila Hallett, Jason Baldwin, Shawn Robinson, Steve Schroeter, Marlene Thompson (missing- Gene Zwozdesky, Anna Somerville, Frank Omoe, Grant Miner)



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During the Annual General Meeting of the NBCMS in February the club elected a new team of Executive and Directors. The election campaign was extensive, although considerably less expensive than our most recent Federal Election. The NBCMS is lucky to have the following folks act as our Executive for the upcoming year :

- **Ron Mercer** as President (3rd term)
- **Sheila Hallett** as Vice President (long time club member, new to the Executive)
- **Jason Baldwin** as Treasurer (2nd term)
- **Leonard Swanson** moved from his Vice President role to Secretary.

The club would like to thank Corinna Diamond for her contributions as Secretary during the previous year. We should also thank Leonard for filling the VP role last year and then moving to the Secretary role for this year.

The returning Directors are :

- **Kinley Miller** as Director of Advertising and Membership
- **Anna Somerville** as Workshop Director (which includes the Fall Workshop and the Annual Winter Jam Camp)
- **Shawn Robinson** as NBCMS Webmaster
- **Steve Schroeter** as Equipment Director
- **Marlene Thompson** as Front of the House Director
- **Frank Omoe & Grant Miner** as Co-Editors for the Newsletter

One new Director was elected, **Gene Zwozdesky**, as Concert Director. We need to thank Marc Ladoucer for taking on the Concert Director role last year.

The NBCMS club is looking forward to another great year under the leadership of the new Board !

Ronnie's Ramblin's by NBCMS President Ron Mercer



Our annual general Meeting (AGM) was held on Feb. 3, 2016 and I was fortunate to be re-elected as President. With the addition of Gene Zwozdesky and Sheila Hallett to the board, I believe we have a super team for this term. We will have our Executive Retreat sometime in March to make our goals and plans for the 20th year of the club. If any of you folks have ideas, please contact myself or anyone of the executive and talk to us.

Everyone who knows me knows that I love promoting bluegrass from within. Local bluegrass bands, musicians and various organizations have helped keep our specific music alive in Edmonton. Since 2016 is the 20th anniversary of the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society I am going to propose that we look back at the folks who helped build this club. So, I suggest something between these two scenarios:

Option #1 In my mind I picture valet parking, a high class ballroom, live bluegrass music, people wearing stunning evening gowns and tight black tuxedos, trays of exotic finger foods, exciting media coverage with lots of TV cameras, a well known celebrity MC and a huge panoramic screen showing beautifully scripted videos of our wonderful bluegrass history. People would graciously accept their large gold trophies of recognition while delivering short clever speeches. What a tribute! What a night to remember.

Option #2 Our Treasurer (Jason Baldwin) indicated this event might have to be pared down to meet more fiscal efficiencies. It was suggested that it be held at the Pleasantview Hall on a Wednesday night after Bluegrass 101 (because that's really popular). Sheila Hallett (Vice President) thought of "wear a funny hat" night instead of gowns and tuxedos because she has some dandy caps at home. Marlene Thompson (Hospitality Director) said maybe she could get the "good" cookies (not from the Costco bargain bin) since it's a special night. Kinley Miller (Merchandise Director) suggested NBCMS stickers instead of gold recognition trophies and maybe not charge the full \$2 at the door. Gene Zwozdesky (Concert Director) could fire up our cassette tape player and crackle out some poorly recorded bluegrass music from past radio shows. Ron Mercer could be the MC when he interrupts the jam circle and announces that this is the 20th Anniversary Gala. Perhaps the newsletter team (Grant Miner & Frank Omoe) could snap a picture from their I-phones for the summer newsletter if there is any space left. What a night to remember!

On another note, I was looking through my paperwork and found an article that I wrote for the newsletter about 10 years ago. It still seems relevant for the newcomers today. I had just started coming to the circle and this was my experience:

Continued...

Ronnie continues to Ramble...Here is the article he sent to the Newsletter 10 years ago....

"I am a banjo picker but whenever I listen to music, it's the guitar solos that touch my soul. Those bluegrass flat-pickers amaze me with "simple" up-down-up strokes on the strings.

So, armed with guitar tablature downloaded from the net, I begin my woodshedding process. I choose a melody that I'm familiar with and practice the complicated chord changes while I hum out my (soon to be) blazing guitar solo. "Red Haired Boy" is gonna blister! It takes me about a week to finally memorize the tab notes so I don't have to look at the music stand. I sometimes feel like a rooster with all that head bobbing.... music to guitar neck - to right hand - to music- back to guitar neck - to right hand....

I practice this tune every day for about 20 minutes after work before the wife gets home. If I miss a practice, I actually feel guilty. Weeks later, one morning, after a great sleep, I wake up just bursting to play! I grab my guitar and Red Haired Boy literally explodes off the strings. My wife says she was humming that tune all morning and I know I am ready for the "circle".

At the following Wednesday night, someone starts playing "my" tune on the banjo. Smiling confidently, I get up and drag a microphone over to me. I receive the "nod" from Augie and start to pick.

Oh No! Oh No! I learned it in G and everyone knows that it should be played in A. Some girl beside me hands me a funny looking capo while the circle patiently keeps the beat. I throw the capo on my third fret and start my solo again. I play the first part 3 times, kind of blank out a bit on the second part and suddenly realize I might be playing in Bb not A. (note to self : capo 2nd fret)

Someone politely takes my microphone away. I hand the capo back. Who turned up the hall's thermostat, I suddenly feel so hot. I give my guitar tuner a puzzled look while I fiddle with it. I keep my head down but there are no repercussions or rotten tomatoes from anyone. Ah, the circle of trust.

Next week I'll get a standing ovation for sure. I'm learning Blackberry Blossom."

Ron Mercer

Spring Newsletter

By Co-Editors Frank Omoe & Grant Miner



Our job as Co-Editors has been made much easier by many of the club's members who contributed articles recently (apologies to anyone we missed):

Ron Mercer, Jim Storey, Carolyn Hotte, Shawn Robinson, Jason Baldwin, Sheila Hallett, Mike Bunting, Leonard Swanson, Anna Somerville, Gene Zwozdeksy, Brian Ficht, Eric Papsdorf, Bob Leitch, Clem Bray and Noel McNaughton.

Since February 2015 when we started co-editing the newsletter they have all been asked, or volunteered, to spend time putting thoughts to paper for your enjoyment, along with some great photographs. One thing we'd like you to do, when you see them, is to tell them how much you enjoy and appreciate their articles. I know we sure do.

If you have attended a concert, workshop, camp or would like to share your knowledge about anything to do with bluegrass in an article, please let us know.

Prairie Sky - Raise The Bar “Christmas Style” by Sheila Hallett

From our band’s experience, this was a great gig. Christmas spirit was in the air. People were jovial and having a good time with their friends after having a wonderful meal. Since this was the official Christmas party of the NBCMS we were thrilled to be asked to play a half-hour set and lead off the jam for the first few tunes.

Leading up to the event we worked on what tunes might fit into the seasonal celebration. We knew we weren’t going to be able to do all Christmas songs since they are rarely part of anything we do, so we opted to start off the set with stuff we love to play. We picked our tunes from a few music genres: some traditional bluegrass tunes (Flatt & Scruggs’ *I’ll Go Step-pin’ Too*; Jimmy Martin’s *Honey You Don’t Know My Mind*), some old rock songs that we grassed up (Steely Dan’s *Stuck in the Middle With You*; The Beatles’ *I Saw Her Standing There*; and *House of the Rising Sun*- made famous by The Animals). One of our favourite songs to play is an instrumental written by John Reischman entitled ‘*Salt Spring*,’ so we had to fit that on the set list.



The tunes we picked to provide a nod to the season gave us the opportunity to get out our favourite Christmas headgear and invite folks to sing along (Elvis Presley’s *Blue Christmas* and Bing Crosby’s *White Christmas*). Everyone was singing so beautifully, and it put Kenny in the mood to read “*T’was the Night Before Christmas*” (*hillbilly style*) right in the middle of the song. It didn’t seem to throw a curve as the audience were good sports, joined right back in singing again when Kenny finished his story, and it sounded mighty fine! Folks seem to like to have their funny bone tickled on occasion and that’s something Kenny aims to do at every performance. In fact , very often, the most feedback we get after we play is people coming up with some new jokes for Kenny to add to his catalogue. We’ve performed for a few years together so we’re comfortable as a unit and we are all in favour of trying to add entertaining elements to our performance to mix things up a bit.

Leading the “Raise the Bar” jam afterwards was a lot of fun for us. We were told ahead of time to make sure we picked some challenging tunes for the group and *raise the bar*. The circle stepped right up and held their own (we knew they would... they’re all jamming pros!) Everyone around the circle followed proper jamming etiquette, and that made it enjoyable for everyone. Great job y’all!

Club president, Ron Mercer, gave us the license to be silly so we had a blast and loved all the smiling faces in the audience. We all had fun and hope the club folks did too. Thanks to the NBCMS Board for asking us to play. It was a real pleasure for us. Hope y’all have us back now, ya hear!

Prairie Sky consists of Sheila Hallett (banjo); Jeannette Sinclair (guitar); and Kenny Mak (bass). Unfortunately, this was the last performance for Prairie Sky mandolin player Alex Boudreau. After five years with the band—he’s moved on and we wish him luck. Prairie Sky is excited to announce our newest band member, Marty Srayko. Marty comes from a diverse musical background and his skills as a mandolin and guitar player are second to none. We’re looking forward to playing with Marty and we welcome him to Prairie Sky. (Prairie Sky also played a Raise The Bar concert in March)

To learn more about Prairie Sky please check out our website - www.prairie-sky.net

...and some more Christmas Party pictures



President Ron Mercer sold out all of the tickets, with Tex Taylor riding shotgun



Alex Hallett, Sheila Hallett, Erin Kushnirik, & Alex Boudreau



Prairie Sky on Stage (bringing in the Christmas season "bluegrass style")



Don and Gloria Kupidy, Linda Saboe, Doug and Cathy Reid



Long time NBCMS President, Carolyn Hotte and daughter Kayla

Up The Creek by Frank Omoe



Besides great music, probably the most important thing to know about **Up The Creek** is that they *al-*ways travel with a paddle. In 2007, Ron Woytiuk and Jacques Hurabielle discovered that they were neighbors living just outside of Devon. They started jamming together, adding a banjo player named Grant McCarthy shortly after meeting him at an NBCMS workshop. Gradually present members were added until last year when newest member, Sue Green, joined the band. Jacques left the band to live in Belgium for a few years. Rivaling Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder in number, **Up The Creek** are:

Leonard Swanson: dobro, fiddle, guitar, vocals - our master of the music

Grant McCarthy: banjo - our eldest statesman with the amazing finger rolls

Mark Edwards: fiddle, clarinet, vocals - master of our final weekly jam closing tune *Good Night Irene*

Anthony Bentz: mandolin - our most ferocious player & a strong supporter of mandolin string makers

Al Kucy: electric bass - still daring the band to buy him a double bass

Sue Green: guitar, fiddle, bass, accordion, vocals - our best sounding voice and a real musician

Eric Papsdorf: guitar, wannabe fiddle, vocals

Ron Woytiuk: rock solid rhythm guitar, vocals - our level-headed spokesman

The band began playing classic bluegrass tunes but has continued to add roots, folk, blues and even a little Beatles. We enjoy playing instrumentals, especially such tunes as *Salt Creek*, *Clinch Mountain Backstep*, *Gold Rush*, and *Saint Anne's Reel*.

Up the Creek has two regular annual gig spots: as the Devon Community Singers each May and at the Canada Day celebrations at the Devonian Botanical Gardens. They have performed at many church services including the Edmonton Moravian, Rio Terrace Moravian, Camp Van Es, St. Paul's United, Cowboy Church and The Rock Victory Church in Onoway. In 2010 they performed at Kaleidoscope. **Up The Creek** performed with **Brett Kessel** at the memorial service for good friend, **Gary McPherson**. A special treat was to play in the Castle Mountain Lodge. Birthday parties and wedding anniversaries have always been a great time. According to Eric, "Playing at **Ron Mercer's** House Concerts and the Pleasantview Raise the Bar Jam last June might have been our best gigs."

Just for the fun of it, **UTC** has recorded a not-for-sale CD that will be released in the next couple of months. They are very pleased with the quality of sound that was captured and demonstrates the ability of their musicians. They played for a 60th birthday of a good friend and fan who built a complete stage for them to perform on. The back, sides and ceiling were of blue poly tarps and provided a great sound environment for them to hear each other very well. When they can hear that chop of Anthony's mandolin, everybody sits in that groove and they have a great time.

You can contact **Up The Creek** at Ron Woytiuk (780) 470-0234 or ronpeggywoytiuk@gmail.com

Cabin Fever Band by Grant Miner

“Ranger Pat” Guidera , while living in Hinton, Alberta, began playing bluegrass in the early 1990’s in the all forestry band named “Stumped”, later re-named “Loggerhythm”.

Upon arriving in Edmonton in 2003, Pat began performing in the Northern Bluegrass House Band. After two years with the House Band, Pat, Don Lecky, Michelle Guidera and Augie Hangartner formed the new group called “Cabin Fever Band”.



Twelve years and five banjo players later, the modern **Cabin Fever Band** is:

Patrick Guidera (Guitar/vocals), founding member

Toby Tellier (upright bass/vocals),

Frank Omoe (Mandolin),

Kyeler Tymafichuk (Fiddle/Banjo/vocals),

Dodie Baker (Guitar/vocals).

Pat writes, “This group has the keenest band members I have ever played with, wanting to practice weekly and refine our brand and sound. Solid musicianship combined with tight three part harmony singing are the goals. Remembering new names is also a mini-goal, for me. At our second gig together at the Kipnes Centre in Edmonton, I was introducing the band on stage. It takes some flair and is always a challenge if you're not sure how to pronounce everyone’s last names. I was introducing the band and was doing really well till I got to my good friend Frank. I called his last name, “OHNO,” which completely broke up the whole band because actually his last name is OMOE ! Well they all nearly fell off the stage, I turned a hundred shades of red, I was so embarrassed and felt real bad! Now at least I know everyone's last name really well.”

Cabin Fever has an ambitious schedule planned, which, to date, includes The Radway Festival of Stars in May, a 50th anniversary celebration in June, and two birthday parties (on the same day!) in July.

For more information about the **Cabin Fever Band** and for bookings please check out their web site at www.cabinfeverband.ca or by phoning Pat at 780-235-8671.

Winter Jam Camp by Noel McNaughton

It was Friday afternoon, and 39 lucky jammers headed for Camp He Ho Ha for WINTER JAM CAMP 2016. We got there, picked up our 'Jam Camp Packages' found our rooms, threw our stuff on the bed, and started jamming. At 6:00 we stopped for an excellent supper. Food was great for the whole weekend.



Noel in the moment

After supper and before the all-night jamming started, we had a contest. Teams were already made up. To find our team all we had to do was look at the number on the bottom of our name tags. The contest was to list as many songs as possible that were listed in the jam camp song book (ideally with their authors or the group that made them famous) in 5 minutes. The ones with the most got points. Our team didn't think to simply look at the list and write some songs down, but I am not sure that other teams didn't do that! Suffice it to say, our team didn't win.

Throughout the weekend people got points for various activities. Whenever we did something worth a point (or more) we got a nifty sticker on the back of our name tags. Points were given for :

- Latest to bed, First one jamming in the morning, First in the dining room for breakfast
- Going on the forced march, Being in the band scramble, Being in the open stage
- Eating Jello (there were some little containers of Jello left on Sunday, so Anna cleverly offered a point for each Jello eaten. Some serious eating took place to try to win a prize)
- Doing various other things that I don't recall because I was one of the three up the latest Friday and Saturday night

The runners-up got a good quality set of strings. Those folks were: Cindy Letcht, Jason Baldwin, Rob Baker, Noel McNaughton, Ron Mercer and Rick Gerior. Grand prize winner was Scott Degan who won a very nice capo.

A few years ago Anna instituted the '**Forced March**'. This year was no different. Wearing our heavy winter clothing, twenty-two hardy souls marched out into the woods in brutally cold January blizzard (ok, maybe not a blizzard but there was a bit of breeze). We went somewhat deep into the woods (or maybe it was just a little way along the lake) and finally came to a park bench where a samovar of hot chocolate awaited us. Someone brought a mickey of hellfire cinnamon whiskey which went well with the hot chocolate.

On Saturday night we had a really groovy **Band Scramble**. All we had to do to figure out which band we were in was look at the colour of our name tags. Another one of Anna's clever tricks.

Sunday, after jamming for a few hours, it was time for Open Stage. There were several bands, and I was again impressed with the great music people came up with when they had never played together as a band before.

Anna Sommerville did a great job of organizing the jam camp. It is a LOT of work, and we REALLY appreciate all she did. Don Lecky was another unsung hero as he brought the sound system, as he always does. Part of the Camp Package was a jamming song book Anna put together with list of 100 songs put together by Jack Tuttle (www.jacktuttle.com). All too soon it was time to go home. It is one of the best values for the money I know of and I wouldn't miss it for the world. If you weren't there, DON'T MISS THIS CAMP NEXT YEAR!

Winter Jam Camp...Great article by Noel, along with his pictures that clearly tell the story !



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Raising the Bar with the Bix Mix Boys – By Bob Leitch

The Edmonton based **Bix Mix Boys** presented their considerable talents at the monthly “Raise the Bar” event held at Pleasantview Hall on Jan 13, 2016. In front of over 50 enthusiastic fans, they played and sang a range of traditional and well known bluegrass classics.



Featuring Logan Sarchfield on guitar, Darcy Whiteside on banjo, Terry Nadasdi on mandolin and Jim Storey, a founding member of NBCMS, on upright bass, (Fiddle player Tony Michael was unavailable) the band demonstrated hard-driving rhythms and tight harmonies. They opened with a fast paced instrumental called “Rebecca” which allowed band members to showcase their picking prowess! Next up was “Big Spike Hammer” with its vocal intricacies, followed by “Cold Sheets of Rain,” “I’ll Be Gone,” and a particularly gritty and intense version of “Ashes of Love.” As a contrast, they then presented a beautifully flowing and melancholy version of “Across the Great Divide.” The Bluegrass Classic “In the Gravel Yard” was sung using traditional high harmonies and displaying some great picking breaks. A highlight of the evening was the band’s version of “Rocky Top.” The audience loved the high lonesome sound of the harmonies in this classic. All too soon, the stage portion of the evening came to an end with the band doing “Crazy Heart” as their encore.

The “Jam” portion of the evening was also amazing! About 20 jammers joined with the band as they started out with a series of well known bluegrass jewels including “Blue Ridge Cabin Home,” “Old Kentucky Home,” and “Dark Hallow.” This allowed participants to join in the harmonies and take their turns on the breaks.

There were additional hi-lite jamming moments when esteemed club President, Ron Mercer out did himself singing a high tempo version of “Crying Holy,” with everyone assisting in the harmonies. Noel McNaughton kept things going with “Salty Dog Blues”. Thanks to the **Bix Mix Boys** for a great evening of music and entertainment. Special thanks goes out to Marlene Thompson for arranging to have cheese, vegetable and fruit trays available for all to enjoy.

Of interest, **Bix Mix Boys** Darcy Whiteside and Jim Storey host “Prairie Pickin” every Thursday night at 7:06 p.m. on CJSR 88.5 FM. See their web site “thebixmixboys.ca”.



Wintergrass 2016 by Brian Ficht

Who would guess that you can hold a major bluegrass festival in a 5 star hotel in the middle of winter in Bellevue, Washington? Well, I am a believer and one of the converted, as this year was my 4th time attending. Organizers quote a total attendance over the 4 days at around 20,000 (about 4,000 per day, with Saturday seeing almost double that number). It's at a Hyatt hotel, with two thirds of the rooms in the hotel set aside for festival-goers at half the standard rate. There is an interesting interface at the hotel between the regular clientele, in evening gowns and Armani suits, and the woolly bluegrass hoard in sandals or hiking boots, flannel checks and overalls.



The hotel has 3 very large ballrooms, as well as a number of smaller showrooms and meeting rooms, all of which are full of mainstage acts, smaller shows, plus instrument/subject specific workshops. All the stages and workshops are running at the same time, so a bit of planning is required to see the offerings that are must-see priorities. However, with 38 acts in total, even the most motivated will manage to see only a portion of what is offered. The stage acts offered cover a broad swath of acoustic music, certainly well beyond the general umbrella of bluegrass.

Headline acts this year were Noam Pikelny's solo show, the Earls of Leicester, Seldom Scene (my favourite), Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver, Helen Highwater, the Hounds Tooth Boys (a new super-group on their first outing), and the Molly Tuttle Band to mention a few. But beyond that there were bands with Native and African-American roots, Irish, Australian, Swedish, some with Ukrainian roots, and yes, even a couple of acts from Canada; Petunia and the Vipers (what a hoot), and the Bombadils (from Montreal).

One of my surprise faves was the Earl Brothers Hillbilly Trance that was like nothing I have seen before...a seven piece band with two fiddles and two electric basses, with one of the basses loudly playing only the 'one' note (like a beating bass drum) for most of their set, the other bass, a Danelectro Longhorn being played lead-style, all twangy and reverbed-up like out of a surf band...great musicianship from the entire act, a great big laugh with the chops and vocals to back it all up.

Wintergrass is also a major jam-fest (the best part for many, me included), and often what is being played in the hotel rooms and hallways is arguably good enough for mainstage presentation. Great music is being played EVERYWHERE in the hotel; in stairwells, alcoves, corners, foyers. (proof as provided in the above picture!).

One year I was serenaded by a 3 piece group that had taken up residence in one of the elevator cars. About half of the festival hotel rooms are designated as jamming rooms, so the fun doesn't stop until way into the wee hours when pure exhaustion makes the call for bed-time.

Continued...

...**Wintergrass 2016** continued....

There is a very large industry presence of luthiers displaying an astounding variety of beautiful and unique handmade guitars, fiddles, cellos, mandos, banjos, ukes...things to play that you can take home. My pal, Mark Thibeault of Rayco Resophonics is one of the festival sponsors, and his booth is ground zero for some of the hottest jamming you will hear. There are string and tuner manufacturers, bow and pick specialists, clothing sellers, scented soap and candle makers, as well as a few booths promoting upcoming festivals. If there is a connection to acoustic music and those who play, there is someone there to outfit you and to help you find more.

For me, besides the jamming, the next best part of the festival is seeing and playing with friends from across western North America that I have met over the years at events like the Nimblefingers Workshop at Sorrento, and the various festivals and camps here in Alberta and BC. It's kind of like a giant family reunion of musical gypsies that happens only a couple of times a year. It's a wonderful thing!

If you are considering attending in the future, get the wheels turning soon. The rooms at the host hotel, Hyatt Regency Bellevue, go quickly, and staying anywhere else is a distant second choice. You need to have a Wintergrass ticket (non-refundable) for next year's show before you can book a room, so firm up your plans and do it while you have the chance.

<http://wintergrass.com>

Instrument Roles in Bluegrass (borrowed from [Jack Tuttle](#))

Banjo - Provides much of the "drive" in bluegrass. 5th string (G) is used as a drone. Lots of chordal arpeggios surround melody notes made up of hammers, slides and pull-offs. Breaks are occasionally played up the neck. Sometimes vamps closed chords during backup.

Mandolin - Lots of blues influences in solos. Quarter and eighth note triplets are common. Tremolo is common on slow pieces. Mostly chops on the offbeat during backup, with occasional extra upstroke hits just ahead of the offbeat. Can provide fills during vocal songs.

Guitar - Solos are often based less on a melody than the other instruments. Rhythm playing features bass runs and fills, especially G runs at every opportunity. Very dynamic strumming with surprisingly quiet normal strumming but very aggressive swells at the end of lines.

Fiddle - Solos are a mix of double-stops, slides and fast single notating. Traditionally it follows a melody of a song for the first three lines, yet with lots of blues imparted into it, and then departs from the melody on the last line. It fills actively in the vocal holes at times.

Bass - Good groove for bluegrass usually involves fairly simple bass lines – root, 5th alternating on downbeats. Bass runs connect one chord to another. "Walking" is left for bouncy numbers with a swing feel, or to change the texture of a song (during instrumental breaks).

Dobro - The least common bluegrass instrument. Generally uses lots of slides, hammers and banjo-like rolls. On slow songs it tends to play lots of chordal movements. On fast songs, it tends to play very dynamic, highly punctuated phrases. Fills more actively on slow songs and often vamps on the off-beat or is silent.

Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys by Jim Storey

Sunny Jim decided to feature a bluegrass icon, Jimmy Martin in this issue's Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys. I think that you will find it most interesting....

James H. "Jimmy" Martin (August 10, 1927 – May 14, 2005) was an American bluegrass musician, known as the "King of Bluegrass". Jimmy Martin was born in Sneedville, Tennessee, Jimmy was raised in the hard farming life of rural East Tennessee. He grew up near Sneedville, singing in church and with friends.



When he was in his teens he bought a guitar. Martin told *The Big Book of Bluegrass*: "I learned the basic chords from an old hillbilly named Reuben Gibson, who lived in the hills around Sneedville, and I taught myself how to play. I heard Lester Flatt and Charlie Monroe both play runs, but I didn't try to top them. I mostly just developed them how I felt, when it came natural for a song."

In the winter of 1949, Mac Wiseman had just left Bill Monroe's "Bluegrass Boys". Martin, who wanted to apply for the vacant post as guitarist, rode the bus into Nashville. He sneaked in backstage at the Grand Ole Opry. While picking his guitar, he was overheard by "Bluegrass Boys" banjo player Rudy Lyle who brought him forward and presented him to Monroe. Martin sang two songs with Monroe and was hired instantly.

Beginning in 1949 Martin was lead vocalist for Bill Monroe's "**Bluegrass Boys**". Martin's high voice mixed with Monroe's tenor and came to be known as the "high lonesome" sound. His influence radically changed Monroe's music from the fast-paced but smooth style of the "original" 1945 band with Flatt and Scruggs. Martin challenged Monroe to raise the pitch on many of his classics and to write new, "lonesome" songs. Martin's lead was defining in "lonesome" songs such as "Sitting Alone in the Moonlight", "Memories of Mother and Dad" and "I'm Blue, I'm Lonesome".

Martin had a famously high-strung and exuberant personality, and inevitably clashed with Monroe's equally stubborn temperament. He left Monroe and worked briefly with the **Osborne Brothers** until he formed his own band, "**The Sunny Mountain Boys**" in 1955. The classic lineup of this band, with J. D. Crowe and "Big" Paul Williams (stage name for Paul Humphrey) defined his "Good 'n Country" style, a commercially oriented, crowd-pleasing bluegrass with simple harmonies, catchy melodies, and a strong rhythm propelled by Martin's effective guitar playing. He credited himself with inventing the "G" run - a guitar lick used widely in the bluegrass genre. However, aural evidence from the period before Martin began performing professionally clearly shows Lester Flatt using this run when backing Bill Monroe.

Three important components of Martin's unique sound, besides his cutting tenor voice, were tight trio singing, sometimes a female high-baritone fourth part, and the use of a snare drum in place of mandolin to keep the back-beat.

....Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys by Jim Storey

Among Martin's biggest hits of the 1960s were "Hit Parade of Love", "Sophronie", "Stepping Stones", "Tennessee", and "Widow Maker" (a popular truck driver's song). His instrumentals (with the Sunny Mountain Boys) such as "Theme Time", "Bear Tracks" and "Red Rooster" featured ultra-crisp playing by a series of banjo players including Sam "Porky" Hutchins, J.D. Crowe, Vernon McIntyre Jr. and Bill Emerson, and powered by Martin's guitar runs, set a standard for bluegrass instrumentals that was highly influential.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Jimmy Martin's Sunny Mountain Boys included singer and instrumentalist Gloria Belle, who is considered the first female lead singer in bluegrass. She toured Japan with Martin during 1975. In regards to her playing, Martin said jokingly, "She's not very good, but we let her sing with us 'cause we feel sorry for her."

Martin was famous as a dangerously unpredictable but highly entertaining stage presence. He freely acknowledged his problems with drinking and volatile mood swings, which kept him from realizing his lifelong dream of joining the Grand Ole Opry.

He made frequent appearances on the Louisiana Hayride and Wheeling, West Virginia's WWVA Jamboree (renamed Jamboree U.S.A. in the 1960s), as well as the Grand Ole Opry, but was never invited to join the latter.

He performed on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 1971 album, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* as well as Volume II (1989) and Volume III (2002).

He joined producers Randall Franks and Alan Autry for the In the Heat of the Night (TV Series) cast CD "Christmas Time's A Comin'" performing "Christmas Time's A Comin'" with the cast on the CD released on Sonlite and MGM/UA for one of the most popular Christmas releases of 1991 and 1992 with Southern retailers.

Martin died May 14, 2005, in Nashville, Tennessee, after having been diagnosed with bladder cancer more than a year earlier. He is interred in the Spring Hill Cemetery in Madison, Tennessee. A report of his death in the *Toronto Star* called him "one of the greatest vocalists in bluegrass".

In 1995, Martin was inducted into the International Bluegrass Music Hall of Honor. A documentary on his life, *King of Bluegrass: The Life and Times of Jimmy Martin*, was released in 2003. Martin is also featured in the documentary film *High Lonesome*.

Martin's hobby was raccoon-hunting with dogs; he featured his hunting dogs on the covers of several LP albums and wrote songs celebrating their prowess. His troubles with the Nashville music industry are memorialized in "The Death of Jimmy Martin", a song by Tom Russell on *The Wounded Heart of America* album.

(Article borrowed from Wikipedia)



The Pluckin' Holler Boys by Leonard Swanson



The February 3 AGM began with a concert by a great young band making their NBCMS debut: The Pluckin' Holler Boys. They are a truly local band, with most members living just minutes from Pleasantview Hall! The group has been together for about five years and consists of Brennan Cameron on mandolin, Elliot Thomas on banjo, Matt Grier on guitar and Keith Rempel on bass. They have all known each other over the years as roommates and fellow band members in a variety of ensembles and genres. Their influences range from old-time music to Ricky Scaggs to the progressive music of The Bills. However, their biggest inspiration comes from the great vocal harmony tradition of bluegrass music. Each member of the group contributes to lead and harmony vocals, allowing for some great bluegrass multi-part vocal harmony.

The Pluckin' Holler Boys opened their set with a funky, grassified version of Vince Gill's "Liza Jane," then quickly segued to a great rendition of the bluegrass classic, "Old Home Place," with Matt providing strong lead vocals and the band supporting with tight three-part harmonies. Keith took over the vocal lead with "Foggy Mountaintop," then Elliot shifted gears and led the band in brisk clawhammer-driven versions of "Rabbit in a Log" and "Nellie Kane." Beautiful renditions of the "Maple Leaf Waltz" and "A Simple Life" added some slower songs to the mix. Brennan and Keith showed their vocal duet skills in The Bill's song "Hello" and, for a closer, Matt led the group in the bluegrass classic "Rocky Top," which featured Keith in one of his several great bass solos - what a treat.

Of course the Pleasantview audience would not let them go without an encore, and the band did not disappoint, giving what I can only assume is the very first NBCMS performance of a Trooper song, a wonderfully grassified version of "The Boys in the Bright White Sports Car." All in all a great performance by an band that most in the room were hearing for the first time, and one that is now on everyone's radar.



Inside the Vault by Frank Omoe

If you turn left after the front entry table and go up the stairs at Pleasantview Hall, you will find the NBCMS Library. And what a treasure trove it is! There are dozens of CD's, lots of DVDs, and many instructional books on every bluegrass instrument and the voice. They are just waiting for someone like you or me to take them home. The CDs are stored in alphabetical order according to the name of the artist. Simply open the sign out binder, write the name and number of the item(s), your name and the date when it was signed out (then returned). It's that easy. Whether you want to figure out "that song" or just want to hear some great music by a familiar or "new to your ears" artist or band, check out the Library.

In each issue of the Newsletter, I feature items that are in the Library. For this Spring Issue, I'll share my thoughts on a couple of CDs, the first by **The Gibson Brothers** and the second by an incredible collection of women (almost 50 in all) who call themselves **The Daughters of Bluegrass**.

If you find a very interesting CD, DVD, or instructional book in the library, and would like to share your impressions, please contact either Grant Miner or me. We'd love to print what you think.

Ring the Bell - The Gibson Brothers

I wanted to listen to some **Gibson Brothers** music when mandolin player **Joe Walsh** was still in the band so I selected this 2009 disc that featured the 2010 IBMA song of the Year, "*Ring the Bell*." There are 12 songs on the 40 min and 40 second CD, six of which were written or co-written by **Leigh and Eric Gibson**. There was a nice mix of tempos on the combination of secular and gospel bluegrass music.

While there were no instrumental tunes, the musicianship of Eric (banjo), Leigh (guitar), Joe Walsh (mandolin), **Clayton Campbell** (fiddle), **Mike Witcher** (resonator guitar), **Mike Barber** (upright bass) and **Erick Jaskowick** (percussion on "*Farm of Yesterday*") was very evident. I especially liked Walsh and Campbell's licks on "*Just an Old Rounder*" (my favourite track on the album). The famous Gibson Bros harmony was spot on making songs like "*Jericho*" and "*Forever Has No End*" come alive. It's rare to have both Momma and Daddy as the topic of two different songs on a CD but the Gibsons pull it off on "*I Know Whose Tears*" and "*Bottomland*." **Ring the Bell** was a great listen.



Inside the Vault continued...

Bluegrass Bouquet The Daughters of Bluegrass

You know that a Tom and Dixie Hall song is going to be a good one. This 60 minute and 13 second 2008 release from Blue Circle Records contains seventeen Tom and Dixie songs, some specially written for this CD. All the instruments are played and the singing is done by nearly fifty ladies who call themselves the **Daughters of Bluegrass**. Bearing the surnames of Stanley, Hall, Martin, Smith, Isaacs, Bowman, Cooper demonstrate these are truly pedigreed “daughters of bluegrass.” Add a Vincent, Hull, Jones, Haislip, Bradley and many more and you have an amazing cast of bluegrass players and singers.

Sometimes liner notes are just generic “hype” with a place for “fill in the band.” Not so for the notes and pictures included on **Bluegrass Bouquet**. To quote the notes, “The **Daughters of Bluegrass** have created a powerful, unstoppable high-lonesome juggernaut that is not only capable of leaping tall buildings in a single bound, but also poignantly and poetically ripping out hearts, dropping all within earshot to their knees, creating cold chills and injecting weary souls with joyous rapture. And, by the way, absolutely no men were employed (or harmed) in the making of this record.” My personal favourite songs were *Carolina State of Mind*, *Everybody Got a Light*, and the opener, *Proud to be a Daughter of Bluegrass* but I could listen to the CD over and over.

Take a listen. You’ll be glad you did.



Jeff Scroggins & Colorado

by Bob Leitch

Jeff Scroggins and Colorado are well known to Edmonton bluegrass aficionados, as evidenced by the over 100 knowledgeable fans who enjoyed an afternoon of high-energy bluegrass music at Pleasantview Community Hall. It was a powerful demonstration of world-class instrumental playing and outstanding vocals supported by energetic rhythms over a wide range of bluegrass songs.



Led by two-time National Banjo Champion Jeff Scroggins, the band includes Jeff's son Tristan Scroggins, himself an award winning mandolin player and Greg Blake, an acclaimed vocalist and award winning guitarist. Ellie Hawkins provided numerous lead and harmony vocals as well as fiddle breaks. Issac Callender looked after the bass fiddle and even did an exceptional dual fiddle break with Ellie.

Jeff noted that his start in Canada began in Edmonton and that in addition to numerous concerts in the Edmonton area he has been active with the Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society through his participation in the Camp He Ho Ha Fall Workshop. Members of the band expressed their appreciation for how well they have been received in the Edmonton area and their resulting affection for supporters in the community.

The band brought their distinctive bluegrass sound to a variety of very traditional songs. Ellie Hawkins sang the lead on "Just a Few Old Memories" by Hazel Dickens and "Today I Burned Your Old Love Letters" by Jim Reeves. Greg Blake followed with "Sea of Heartbreak" by Don Gibson, "I Still Miss Someone" by Johnny Cash, "Galveston" by Jimmy Webb and "Matterhorn" by Mel Tillis. Between songs, Ellie and Tristan kept up a humorous banter on all manner of subjects including mountains in Holland and men never being wrong!

Canadian content was not overlooked as the band performed songs by Gordon Lightfoot and Ian Tyson's iconic "Summer Wages." This was followed by a series of audience favorites including "Blue Night," "Heated Love," "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," "Darcy Farrow," "One Morning In May," and "Rocky Top."

It was an enjoyable musical experience for all. To top it off, great homemade chili & buns (thanks to Bob & Colleen Whaling) and blueberry pie (thanks to Anna Somerville) were available to all attendees.

BLUEGRASS ARTISTS - PAST & PRESENT by Grant Miner

The SteelDrivers

I had the opportunity to see **The SteelDrivers** play at the Arden Theatre in St Albert a few years ago. Although their bass player had a passport problem at the US border, which forced them to bring in a substitute bass player (who did a great job), it was a terrific concert. Some of the local bluegrass crowd were also in the audience. On stage they play up the rougher edges of bluegrass in a humorous way (hard drinking, guns, murder, etc.). They originated in Nashville as a "hobby band" to "keep their bluegrass chops up" and since that time they have played in several bluegrass festivals and released their first album in 2008.



Their style of bluegrass has a gravelly blues sound. This sound was first established when Chris Stapleton was singing with the group and the signature sound seamlessly carried over with the addition of **Gary Nichols** as lead singer, songwriter and guitarist. Based on their St Albert performance, the band leader is **Tammy Rogers**. She grew up in a family band and she has toured with the likes of Trisha Yearwood and Reba McEntire. **Richard Bailey** is on banjo and he has played with a long list of top bluegrass and country artists. **Mike Fleming** plays bass and sings baritone. **Brent Truit** plays mandolin and his playing background includes Alison Kraus, Dolly Parton and the Dixie Chicks.

The group was nominated for a Grammy award in 2009 for Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals for their song "Blue Side of the Mountain." They were presented the International Bluegrass Music Association's award for Emerging Artist of the Year in 2009. In 2010, the group received two nominations for its second album, "Reckless." The album was nominated for both Best Bluegrass Album and Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal for the song "Where Rainbows Never Die."

In 2011 the English pop star Adele began performing the SteelDrivers' song "If It Hadn't Been For Love" in her live performances. Her opinion of The SteelDrivers is: "They're a blues, country, bluegrass, swagger band and they are brilliant." More recently The SteelDrivers' "The Muscle Shoals Recordings" won the Best Bluegrass Album at the 2016 Grammy Awards.

As mentioned, Chris Stapleton was their lead singer and guitarist. In April, 2010 he announced that he was leaving the band to focus on raising his family. However he went on to establish himself in Country music. Chris won the Best New Artist (in his late 30's, mind you) at the 2015 Country Music Awards. He also won Male Vocalist of the Year and Album of the Year.

The club's library (The Vault) has at least one of their albums available for loan so check them out.

Local Bluegrass Bands

We are proud to provide our readers with a list of the local bands who are dedicated to playing *all or mostly* bluegrass music. Most of the bands have web pages so please check them out to learn more about our very own Northern Alberta bands. Listed in no particular order:

Amerada Road

website: ameradaroad.com

Back Porch Swing

website: backporchswing.ca

The Bix Mix Boys

website: www.thebixmixboys.ca

Cabin Fever Band

website: www.cabinfeverband.ca Patrick Guidera (780) 235-8671

Hay City Rollers

website: haycityrollers.com

Devonian Bluegrass Band

contact Larry Seuter (780) 988-8282 or poundslbs@xplornet.com

Kayla Hotte and her Rodeo Pals

website: therodeopals.com

Mountain Spirit

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

Prairie Sky

Sheila Hallett (780) 488-9401 or galbanjo@telus.net Website: www.prairie-sky.net

Up The Creek

contact Ron Woytiuk (780) 470-0234 or ronpeggywoytiuk@gmail.com

Long Way Home

contact Eric Papsdorf etpapsdorf@gmail.com

Whitemud Drive

contact Clem Bray (780) 465-5611 or cbray@telusplanet.net

Pluckin' Holler Boys

contact Matt (780) 915-7807 Mattgrierdrums@gmail.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 NBCMS accept any responsibility if you are not satisfied with the lessons or if still can't play your instrument following your lessons.

Workshops and Camps

June 12-19	Steve Kaufman's Acoustic Kamp Week 1 Maryland, Tennessee
June 19-25	Kaufman's Acoustic Kamp Week 2 for info go to: Flatpick.com
July 29-31	Coombs Bluegrass Festival, Coombs, BC
Aug 21-Sept 2	NimbleFingers Bluegrass, Sorrento, BC

Upcoming Concerts and Festivals in Alberta

Apr. 30	Rotary Park and Cloverpoint Drifters Foothills Bluegrass Music Society, Calgary
May 20-22	Radway Festival of Stars, Radway
July 29-31	Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Festival, Stony Plain
Date TBD	Shady Grove Bluegrass Festival, Nanton

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

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 \$4.00 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.



Bluegrass 101

Bluegrass 101 at Pleasantview Hall is continuing this spring on most Wednesday evenings with Darcy Whiteside and Jim Storey. It is a great chance to learn more about bluegrass and specific bluegrass songs. The participants tell that this is a great feature being offered by the NBMS club.

Following the learning session everyone is invited to join the evening jam on the main floor of the hall.



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