



The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society

Bluegrass Newsletter

Summer 2016

First Mid-Point Jam Camp a Success!

By Marlene Thompson and Frank Omoe

The first Mid-Point Bluegrass Jam Session was held at Gull Lake, on May 7-8. Anna Somerville dreamed up the idea for the 1 1/2 day jam to be held mid way between Edmonton and Calgary. Registration was at 11:00 on Saturday morning and the jamming went through the day (and night for some hardy jammers) ending at 2:30 Sunday afternoon.

Saturday was a beautiful sunny day and, after having a *bit* of trouble finding the place, I was pleasantly surprised at the beauty of Gull Lake Camp. The main area had a few large rooms used for dinners and we had our own kitchen where people took turns making coffee, snacks or just talking. There were four good sized jamming spaces and you could easily walk from one room to another. Twenty rooms let everyone who didn't camp have their own room to sleep. Twenty four musicians attended.



Ruth Henderson, Jackson and Samuel Corry, Diana Stanford and Mike Gilmore jamming at the First Mid-Point Jam Camp. More photos p. 3 Thank you to David Corry for the photos.

One family that I found very outgoing was from Red Deer. The father, David Corry, is learning the fiddle and Mother Tanya plays classical guitar and viola. The sons, Samuel (10-12 years old) and Jackson, (a little older) played the fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin. Jackson is a certified luthier, builds guitars and repairs mandolins, cellos, violins and banjos. He has been to summer camps for three years. Last year he attended the NBCMS Youth Boot Camp at the Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival.

I learned that every first Friday of the month

there is a congregation at the Good Note Farm where music teacher, Maryann Borch, has a group of young people gather for *First Friday Pizza and Fiddle Jam*. She has about 40 youngsters there.

Other people in attendance included Diana Stanford from Medicine Hat, Bob LeGrange of Red Deer, Alberta, Bob Beckwith, Debbie Salmonson, Ron Mercer, and Wilma and Mike Gilmore from Edmonton. Many people commented on the comfortable rooms. The staff was great, the food was outstanding, and the jamming was non-stop.



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Joy, the liaison from Gull Lake Camp couldn't keep herself from coming in and out of the various jams. She was very moved by the spirit she found in the music and the players. Joy said it reminded her of how she had spent her childhood. She didn't think things like this still happened. The next morning she brought her mother and father to come and listen to the jamming.

I really enjoyed the beautiful area and the jams. It was a great first Mid-Point Jam and I look forward to next year.

Ronnie's Ramblin's by NBCMS President Ron Mercer



What kind of pick do you use? The other day as I was putting on my finger picks to start playing my banjo, it got me to thinking. These Sammy Schelor stainless steel picks are almost a part of me now. My good friends Les and Arlene Eberhardt bought these for me several years ago at the IBMA weekend in Nashville as a gift. I had been using some National picks (just like Earl) but they kept wearing down so I had switched to Pro Picks. These were my choice forever; they were comfortable and easy to bend back into shape whenever I stepped on them or lent one to someone else.

So now I had a gift of these shiny new Sammy Schelor picks. I did not like them at all. They were heavy and played just a little too fast and slick for my taste. At first I only used them when I was playing with Les so he could see them on me (they are quite expensive). As it turned out that summer we played a lot together and I finally got used to the new sound I was getting and the feel of these chrome babies. In fact I really started to love them. Today they are such a part of me that I would not enjoy playing the banjo without them. They also give me a chance to think about my old buddy every time I put them on

As I think about the other accessories that are in my banjo case, all of them are my favorites and all of them have a story. I could tell you all about my choice of thumb pick, my strap, my silver plated truss rod cover plate, my tuner, my string gauge, my..... and that's just my banjo stuff.

I also have a guitar, a dobro, a mandolin, a fiddle and one or two more instruments. My friend Linda Saboe always tells me that she spent \$500 on her dobro and about double that on accessories.

Now this got me to thinking. I might be a nerd!! But wait, when I get together with other banjo players and we start discussing the instruments and accessories we have, we all get a little excited. None of us actually would change our choices but we like to sample some of the others. It is kind of like your favourite Pizza place. You found it and it is the best. Other folks tell you about theirs, you try them and go right back to your own.

The point of all this rambling comes out when we head off to band camp. Here we have world class teachers, players and personalities. As we sit down in class, we can't help asking about their choice of instrument and accessories. What kind of pick do you use, sir? It is such a great question to break the ice. I would love to hear stories from all the NBCMS members on their favorite accessory. Why do you like it, would you change, how many do you have, etc? This is plumb interesting stuff.





Marc Ladouceur, Ron Wuetherick, Ed Potter, Diana Stanford, Sheila Hallett, Augie Hangartner, Jackson Corry

Ron Mercer, Bob LeGrange, Les Eberhardt, Don Lecky, Debbi-Lynn Salmonson, Lena Hulbert, Brian Fitch



Greg Yavorsky, Mike Gilmore, Bob Beckwith, Anna Somerville, Samuel Corry, Marlene Thompson



Lots of fun at Mid Point Jam Camp May 7, 8



Ed, Augie, Wilma Gilmore, Marc, Jackson, Sheila, Diana, Ruth and Ron

Sheila, Ron, Les and Bob enjoying the "outdoor" jamming space



Marc "shows the moves" to Augie, Ed, Wilma, Jackson and Sheila

NBCMS is ready for Blueberry

The 2016 Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival is rapidly approaching and the NBCMS will be present in a big way. The famous NBCMS Jamming Tent will be set up and, in addition to drop-in jamming, it will be the site of the Youth Bluegrass Boot Camp Workshop on Saturday afternoon.

Inside the Pavilion will be the NBCMS Display Booth, complete with free picks, pamphlets and cool NBCMS merch. Come and check out Advertising Director Kinley Miller's latest NBCMS line of hats, vests, shirts, coffee cups and other NBCMS paraphernalia, all at or a nickel or so above cost. Bring some friends and encourage them to join the NBCMS. The cost is so reasonable and enables members to receive discounts at the weekly jams, the concerts, workshops, and jam camps.

This year the NBCMS will be looking after the Guitar Raffle at the festival. You know Byron Myhre will donate a beautiful guitar for some lucky winner to take home and play the daylights out of. Tickets will be sold at the NBCMS booth inside the Pavilion and will be \$5.00 each.



NBCMS Treasurer Jason Baldwin and son get the NBCMS Jamming Tent ready for the 2016 festival season



Stony Plain, Alberta, Canada
July 29th, 30th & 31st, 2016

Canada's Largest Bluegrass Festival!

♪ Music Makes A Good Time Better ♪

And just when you thought that the array of artists for the 2015 Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Society Festival couldn't get any better, check out who Norm Sliter and the gang have lined up for 2016!

The Earls of Leicester
Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen
Chris Jones and The Night Drivers
David Parmley and Cardinal Tradition
Bluegrass Etc.
The Po Ramblin' Boys
Canadian Country Music Legends
Dirt Road Angels
Young Medicine

There will be a band competition, workshops, and the Youth Boot Camp.



The Earls of Leicester

2016 Youth Bluegrass Boot Camp Workshop at Blueberry



YOUTH BLUEGRASS BOOT CAMP WORKSHOP



Saturday, July 30 at 1 PM in the workshop tent behind the pavilion



If you're between 6 and 17 years old and play a bluegrass instrument, like a fiddle, banjo, guitar or upright bass, e'mon out for about 2 hours of demos and instruction from some really great bluegrass musicians, geared just for you!



All skill levels are welcome, but you'll need your instrument to participate, so make sure to bring it along!



It'll be a whole lot of Fun!

Special Sign Up Bonus!

Sign up for the youth workshop before **July 23rd**, and we'll give you **AND** your family a **FREE** Saturday festival pass! (parents and siblings only)

To sign up, send us an email at info@blueberrybluegrass.com, or call us at 1-888-915-4973. We'll need to know your name (and your family's name too), your age, which instrument you play, and how many people in your family coming with you to the festival, plus your email address and phone number.

We'll have your day passes waiting for you at the entrance gate!

2016 Acoustic Music Workshop Oct. 14-16

Enjoy Your Musical Interest: Fall Workshop by Anna Somerville, Workshop Director

Many people are drawn to music-making, in part, for the socialization aspect it offers. The **NBCMS Acoustic Music Workshop**, being held Oct. 14-16, is both musically and socially rewarding. The user friendly nature of bluegrass offers opportunities to strengthen existing friendships and initiate new ones. The weekend has lots to offer. Take in as much as you want. The six 1 hour workshops would be enough, but add the unlimited jamming, the delight of the Mini Festival where the guest instructors perform, and then just for fun get something ready for the Open Stage. Then there's all the visiting that goes on. The workshop is an activity that supports your interests and aims at providing positive opportunities to take musical risks and tackle new challenges.

Set aside some time this October to focus on your ability to learn and play.

There is something new at the workshop this year. We will be hosting a two day/one night Ukulele Jam Camp on the Saturday and Sunday of the October 14 – 16th weekend. We have invited Ukulele enthusiasts to attend the Mini Festival on Saturday afternoon and then stay around until Sunday afternoon when we all head home. This will be a chance for them to see the workshop leaders in performance while getting to mingle with the workshop participants. The **NBCMS mission statement is to Present, Preserve and Promote Bluegrass music** and that's what we intend to do. The Ukulele jammers will join the Slow Pitch Jam in the Main Hall Saturday night and find out first hand what a welcoming group of people the bluegrass community can be.

We continue to hold the workshop at **Camp HE Ho Ha** because the facility has everything we need and is operated by a friendly, dedicated group of people who take pride in ensuring we feel right at home; from the comfortable, spacious dorm rooms to the wonderful home cooking.

The best way to find out what's happening this year is to drop me a line at ADSomerville@Shaw.ca or check the website www.Bluegrassnorth.com. This year 13 workshops will be offered. They include Guitar, Banjo, Mandolin, Fiddle, Dobro, Clawhammer, Bass, Singing and the ever popular Bluegrass 101. Information about the workshop leaders will be posted on our website as they are confirmed.

If you are a Ukulele player and want more information go to www.UkuleleJamCamp.com

Expand your musical involvement. Attend the 2016 Acoustic Music Workshop.

Bluegrass has brought more people together and made more friends than any music in the world. You meet people at festivals and renew acquaintances year after year.

Bill Monroe



2016 Acoustic Music Workshop

Friday October 14th
4:00 pm Check in : Main Hall

5:00 pm ORIENTATION and camp tour

6:00 pm SUPPER

7:00 pm PRESENTATION

7:45 pm Workshop in session

8:45 pm SNACK & 50/50 Draw

9:15 pm Jamming: Slow Pitch –Main Hall

Building 3/4 : Intermediate Jam

Building 5/6: Intermediate Jam

George Kidd Lounge: Intermediate Jam

Saturday October 15th
8:30 am BREAKFAST

9:30 am Workshop in session

10:30 15 minute break

10:45 Workshop in session

Noon: Student Band Scramble Rehearsal

12:30 pm LUNCH

1:45 OPEN STAGE George Kidd Lounge

2:15- 5:30 MINI FESTIVAL
Stage 1: Building 3/4
Stage 2: Building 5/6
Stage 3: George Kidd Lounge

5:30 SUPPER

6:30 Workshop in Session

8:00 Student Band Scramble
Guitar Raffle Draw
50/50 Draw

9:00 Jamming: Slow-Pitch & Ukulele Jam
Building 3/4: Intermediate
Building 5/6: Intermediate
George Kidd: Intermediate

Sunday October 16th
8:30 am CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:45 Sunday Morning Sing Along

9:30 Workshop in session

10:30 BRUNCH

11:15 Workshop in Session

12:45 Student Concert

2:30 On the Road

Kayla and Matte Hotte April 20 by Frank Omoe



In February, I attended the Waste Management Golf Championship in Phoenix. I had been told many times that there is a distinctly different sound when the PGA Tour golfers hit the golf ball than when amateurs (like me) do. From the first drive I watched (and heard) I realized that was true. Why do I tell you this? It's because I felt the same way as I heard the distinctly different sound that Kayla and Matt Hotte brought to the Raise the Bar Jam on April 20. I hope that no one takes offense but, in my opinion, there are only a few of our local bands which also have "that sound." The rest of us are striving to reach it.

Taking the audience of about 60 people through a broad spectrum of bluegrass, country and old timey songs, Kayla and Matt's professional talents were finely displayed. I'm sure that Lester Flatt was smiling down from heaven as Kayla used that thumb-pick to walk up and down those bass runs, while maintaining perfect strumming. Her voice really matched the song choices, and she and Matt took turns singing lead throughout the set list which included *Short Life of Trouble*, *The Memory of Your Smile*, *Columbus Stockade Blues*, *Bury Me Beneath The Willow Tree*, an original piece entitled *Dear Mrs. Matthews*, and others, concluding with an encore of Roy Acuff's *Wreck on the Highway*. Their harmony was never sweeter than on *Short Life of Trouble*. Matt once again showed why he is one of, if not the, finest bluegrass multi-instrumentalist in the province. Those present could debate which break was the best: his cross picking guitar solo on *Short Life of Trouble*, the varied mando breaks on *The Memory of Your Smile*, or on *Dear Mrs. Matthews* or all of the beautiful fiddle runs and fills. My personal favourite was his mando break on *Columbus Stockade Blues*, which also featured a very unique arrangement.

Kayla and Matt really seemed to enjoy themselves, even though Matt's ear for perfect pitch took him to the wings of the stage a few times to quickly tune leaving Kayla, who never batted an eye, to continue to play and sing. Professionals..... Joni Mitchell may have been "raised on robbery" but Kayla and Matt were "raised on a stage" and they certainly "raised the bar" at Pleasantview. Thank you for a great night.

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Long Way Home by Grant Miner

On Wednesday, May 25, we had the pleasure of hearing local bluegrass band, “**Long Way Home.**” On this evening the band consisted of the following players:

- Sue Green - vocal, fiddle, guitar
- Stephen Crocker - vocal, banjo
- Paul McFarlane - vocal, guitar
- Terry Ruddy - vocal, stand up bass
- Eric Papsdorf - vocal, guitar
- Dr. Julian Dupuis, (vocal, mando) was home fighting a nasty virus, so Anthony Bentz stepped in to provide the mando chops and breaks (with new strings & none of them broke during the set!)

The band started off with a composition by Steve, a bluesy song about drinking beer in the morning (amongst other things). Anthony added some mando blues pickin’. Paul gave us his version of *Folsom Prison Blues*, followed by Sue’s singing of *Seminole Wind* while playing her Taylor guitar. Eric sang *In The Shadow of Clinch Mountain* with Sue providing a nice fiddle break. Terry did a fine rendition of *Someone Play Dixie For Me* before Steve introduced the audience to another one of his own compositions. This one was about the perils of fooling around with someone else’s wife. I might add that Steve quickly said that the lyrics were *not* autobiographical!

The band gave us a spirited version of *Sitting On Top Of The World*. Anthony provided a fast kick-off, with his new mando strings, while Eric provided the lead singing. **Long Way Home’s** final number was *Freight Train*, the famous Fred Eaglesmith song.

I spoke with Eric after their set. They said they had a great time and really appreciated the chance to play on stage at Pleasantview Hall. Another successful Raise The Bar night.

Local Bluegrass Bands by Frank Omoe

Like beautiful flowers, so, too, do bands have a lifespan. Hey, even the Beatles were together for only ten years! We are sad to see the demise of The Hay City Rollers and The High Point Bluegrass Band. Both brought some great music to the Northern Alberta Bluegrass scene. But new bands are always being formed, two of which are **The Bitter Green** and **The Steepbank String Band**. You can read about The Bitter Green on the next page. At this time, we are proud to say that there are thirteen local bands who are dedicated to playing *all* or *mostly* bluegrass music. All of them have at least one member who belongs to the NBCMS. Most of the bands have web sites or Facebook pages so please check them out to learn more about our very own Edmonton area bands. The following is a list of the bands, in alphabetical order :

Amerada Road

website: ameradaroad.com

Back Porch Swing

website: backporchswing.ca

The Bitter Green

<https://www.facebook.com/TheBitterGreen/>

The Bix Mix Boys

website: www.thebixmixboys.ca

Cabin Fever Band

website: CabinFeverBand.ca

Kayla Hotte and her Rodeo Pals

website: www.therodeopals.com

Long Way Home

contact Eric Papsdorf etpapsdorf@gmail.com

Mountain Spirit

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

Pluckin' Holler Boys

contact Matt (780) 915-7807 Mattgrierdrums@gmail.com

Prairie Sky

contact Sheila Hallet (780) 488-9401 or galbanjo@telus.net

The Steepbank String Band

contact Scott Degen at sdegen@mcsnet.ca

Up The Creek

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

Whitemud Drive

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

The Bitter Green by Frank Omoe

The Bitter Green was formed in early March 2016. They all came together at a bluegrass jam at Cha Island and enjoyed each others' styles of playing, song choices and how they seemed to each be able to complement one another musically.

The name has many meanings depending on who in the band you ask. To Erin, it means delicious salads, bitter green salads. Nico, who particularly enjoys food, would likely agree with that. To Miles, it is inspired by the Gordon Lightfoot song, "Bitter Green."

Miles Zurawell plays dobro and banjo. Inspired by a certain banjo pickin' professor from the University of Alberta, Miles picked up the banjo in 2011 and became hooked on bluegrass. Being relatively new to the genre, he has spent most of his time exploring the traditional bluegrass catalogue. He counts Earl Scruggs, JD Crowe, Rob Ickes, Jerry Douglas, and Bryan Sutton among his influences.



Nico Humby is on the upright bass and sings lead vocals and backup harmonies. His personal style has been developed from years of singing and playing various genres of music such as funk, R&B, rock and swing, hints of which are revealed as he sings and plays bluegrass.

Erin Kushniruk plays guitar and also sings lead vocals and harmony. She first picked up the guitar at 8 years of age and within a year transitioned from classical to bluegrass guitar. Now that nursing school is done and she is settled into working full time, Erin is excited to get back into bluegrass.

The Bitter Green is a relatively contemporary bluegrass band which covers artists such as The Steeldrivers, Kenny and Amanda Smith, Rhonda Vincent and many others. They also enjoy traditional bluegrass, especially tunes with strong harmonies. **The Bitter Green** are currently working on writing songs and hope to have enough original material to record an album next year!

Their first gig was at the Starlite Room opening up for local band Short of Able and they recently played the Heart of the City Festival. They hope to continue to bring bluegrass to diverse audiences.

Miles, Nico and Erin all share similar personalities and viewpoints as well as the love of bluegrass. Nico plays in a funk band called Funk Velvet. Miles and Erin are very happy that Nico keeps his *short* shorts wearing and stage hip thrusting to a minimum during **The Bitter Green's** bluegrass concerts.

You can contact **The Bitter Green** at <https://www.facebook.com/TheBitterGreen/>

Sunny Jim's Bluegrass Storeys by Jim Storey

Last names have been omitted to protect the innocent.....

A little history of the club, and my involvement with the bluegrass scene in the 1990's. There was no bluegrass scene.....it was quite dead. I came to the Fiddler's Roost on 99 street (formerly the City Media Club) through the course of my job at the time. I had a meeting with someone in an office on the upper level and the door to the upstairs was right next to the door to the basement. There was a note on the door saying, "Bluegrass Jam Tonight." I knew what bluegrass was and I was looking for somewhere to start playing music again. I basically had given it up for about 20 years to raise children, buy a house, etc. (if the note had said, "Jazz Jam Tonight," I would probably be playing jazz right now). I went to the jam and attended every one for 5 or 6 years without missing.

When we formed the bluegrass club a couple of years later, and incorporated it, there were seven people involved as I recall – George, Willy, Windi, Don, Susan, Joan and me. We all put \$5 into the pot and opened a bank account. The first years we didn't have access to casino funds. To raise money, we formed a house band, which we called the Northern Bluegrass Band. There were 4 or five core members but if anybody else wanted to contribute, they were welcome. As a result sometimes there were 3 or 4 players and sometimes there were 16 or 17. I was the band director and as such was required to make a set list – very difficult when you didn't know how big the band might be. We played the usual old folks homes, hospitals, etc. - usually for \$20 to \$40 an hour. Every cent went into the bank account, with hopes of maybe buying some audio equipment for the band. At the time everyone provided what equipment they could, and we got by. Big Wally, one of our fiddle players, had a huge powered mixing board (16 track - very heavy and measuring about 4' by 5') with extra large and heavy speakers to match, which we hauled



up and down the steep stairs of the Fiddler's Roost at least a thousand times.

We did over 100 gigs our first year out, and probably the same over the next 3 or 4 years. We managed to get a smaller PA, but it was only a 4 track, so there was always a debate over who should get a mic. We were the first act to play at the Early Stage Saloon in Stony Plain, and played there many times. One New Years Eve there were more people in the band (16) than in the audience. The owner had agreed to pay us \$100, a free meal, and all the beer we wanted to drink. He lost money that night.

Another time we were playing at the Saloon as part of Stony Plain's Farmer Days. They loaded us all into this large wagon, pulled by 2 very large horses, and we played in the big parade. When we got back to the saloon, we unloaded, and big Wally was the last man off. It took about 3 of us to get him down, and as his foot touched the ground, the horses bolted, overturning the wagon and just missed killing big Wally by a few inches. The wagon righted itself as the horses galloped down the street at breakneck speed, ran between two parked cars, destroying the cars, and tearing the wagon off. They caught the horses about two miles out of town. We had many adventures, and it was an exciting time because there had been no bluegrass in Edmonton for many years.....there is now.

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 takes a summer vacation for July and August but it's back to Bluegrass School in September.

"Grassified" Ads

Musician Wanted : Banjo / mando players interested in joining www.thedowneastband.com let me know. Chris Craig 780-938-1957 infodowneastband@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, flat-picking 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



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Wood, Steel & Strings by Grant Miner & Cam Yule

Bass in Bluegrass

Picture the following scene... it is 1:00 AM. You have been jamming for hours with a group of old & new friends in some hallway. People have come and gone over the evening. Then someone walks down the hall with a bass guitar and slips smoothly into the middle of the song of the moment. It is a certainty that several people in the jam circle will start to smile – the full sound of bluegrass has arrived.

The most common bass instrument in bluegrass is the upright acoustic bass. We have several friends who own and play one. Although it is big, awkward, and often dictates the type of vehicle they need to drive, it has a great thump and tone when played properly. If it is constructed of fully carved wood, the top is often spruce, with maple for the ribs, back and neck. Alternatively the bass can be constructed of a laminated material (type of plywood). There are advantages for this type of construction, one being its resistance to changes due to humidity and the other being cost.



Here are some thoughts from Nick Forster, long time bass player with *Hot Rize*, about his use of an electric bass in bluegrass. “I was one of the first to play electric bass in bluegrass. We traveled in a '69 Cadillac and everything had to fit in the trunk. I got booted just loading my tiny bass amp onstage at bluegrass festivals in the late '70s. The pressure eased when *The Osborne Brothers* and *Doyle Lawson's* band started using the electric bass. John Cowan (*Newgrass Revival*) had a great (bass) sound but some other electric bass players in bluegrass were sort of pretending it was an acoustic, and that doesn't generally lead to great note or tone choices.”

More recently the U-Bass has emerged as a new way to get that bluegrass bass sound in a jam or on stage. It is built like a bigger version of a ukulele but with large, soft strings and a built-in pickup. The leading U-Bass manufacturer is Kala, based in California. It is amazing the sound this small instrument can produce when played through a quality bass amp. The wood used in the construction of the body is usually spruce, mahogany or koa, each providing a different tone.

Bass in bluegrass can be played in a number of ways. The most common way is the simple approach of playing the root note. This style provides the foundation for the rest of the instruments and vocals. There is a risk that the bass player can make the tempo drag. Bass players who play on top of, or ahead of, the beat can drive the sound and make it swing. The bass can bridge the chord changes with a bass run. In the 1960s George Shuffler, and also Tom Grey of *The Country Gentlemen*, played some really nice fast running bass, both as breaks and as backing. Check out “austinpickinranch.com” for an introduction to the basics. By the way, in the early days the bass player in the band often assumed the role of the comedian so if you a new bassist, start to work on your material!

A list of some of the highly recognized bluegrass bass players over the years would include Missy Raines, the most decorated bass player in the history of the IBMA. She has seven awards to her name. Tim Surrett won the IBMA bass player of the year in 2015. Tim also co-founded a new recording company called “The Mountain Home Music Company.” The label is now one of the premier labels in Bluegrass, recording such groups as *Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver*, *The Grascals*, *The Lonesome River Band*, *The Boxcars*, *J.D. Crowe*, and *Balsam Range*).

Inside the Vault by Frank Omoe

What an incredible library we have 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.

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.



CD Special Consensus 35

This 2010 release celebrated 35 years of Special Consensus as a band. Banjo player Greg Cahill is the sole founding member who is still with

In this issue, I'll tell you about a CD called **Special Consensus 35**.

I also picked up a CD with the most intriguing title of **AH-Hah! Goes Grass - A Bluegrass Tribute to Bob Wills**.

Finally, I watched a DVD called **Bluegrass 1963 Don Reno and Red Smiley**.

What you read are just my thoughts. I'd love to hear yours.

the band. The other members at the time the CD was pressed were David Thomas (bass), Rick Faris (mandolin) and Ryan Roberts (guitar). The excellent liner notes list the 44 Special Consensus band members since its inception in 1975. Also included is the band's 1975-2010 discography.

In choosing the 12 songs on the 35 min 24 second CD Greg Cahill wrote that six songs were recorded by the present Special Consensus and six were taken from previous Special C



A peek inside "The Vault" looking at half the CD Wall

Recordings that are now out of print. What I noticed was the consistent sound that was present in all of the recordings - a consistency that tells the listener, "This is Special Consensus." My personal favorites on the disc were the 1991 recording of *Fourteen Carat Mind, I Cried Myself Awake* (recorded in 1983), and the instrumental *Danny's Dance*, on which fiddler Stuart Duncan joined the present members. While six years have passed since its release, this is a great representation and celebration of 35 years of the beautiful music and singing of Special Consensus - still going strong!

Inside the Vault... continued by Frank Omoe



Rod Moag

CD
AH-HAA! Goes Grass:
A Bluegrass Tribute to
Bob Wills

Why, and how (for that matter) would anyone try to put the Western Swing Music of Bob Wills (and the Texas Playboys) to bluegrass? Probably for the same inexplicable reasons that Luther Wright and the Wrongs bluegrassified Pink Floyd's entire *The Wall*, in *Rebuild the Wall*, or Tim O'Brien grassed up 13 Bob Dylan songs and called it *Red on Blonde*. Actually, in the liner notes, Rod Moag, the pickin' professor from the University of Austin who put this project together, does answer (as only a university professor can) Why and How? With the help of an all-star cast of musicians: **fiddlers** Byron Berline, Johnny Gimble, Buddy Spicher, Billy Contreras, **banjo players** Alan Munde, Jake Jenkins, Wayne Ross, **dobros** Mike Auldridge, Cindy Cashdollar, Tom Schwatzell, **mandolinist** Paul Glasse, **bassists** Richard Sharp, Mark Rubin, Jerry Lightsey, Don Keeling, and Rod Moag on a number of instruments especially **guitar**, and **vocalists** Dayana Wills (Bob Wills' daughter), Rod Moag, Russell Moore, Don McCallister, Jr. do very interesting and likeable versions of 13 Bob Wills' songs. My favourites were *San Antonio Rose*, *Faded Love* (the obvious ones) plus *Tater Pie*, *Corrine Corrina* and *Roly Poly*. The marriage of Western Swing to Bluegrass on this 36 min 7 second disc, complete with extensive liner notes was a fun listen.



DVD

Bluegrass 1963

Don Reno and Red Smiley

Man-do-lin Productions have consistently put out great DVDs, especially of the First Generation of Bluegrass, of which Don Reno and Smiley were prominent. From 1956-64 Reno and Smiley hosted a morning TV show that showcased their music, comedic sketches that featured their band, "*The Tennessee Cut-Ups*," and welcomed guest bluegrass musician to perform and "jam." The guests for this 1963 broadcast were Ralph and Carter Stanley. Twenty songs are featured on the DVD. Sadly the NBCMS Library copy contained no liner notes. But the music more than made up for that. With live performances of such great songs as, *Love*, *O'Love Please Come Home*, *Down Yonder*, *In the Pines*, *Over in the Gloryland*, *Nine Pound Hammer*, *I'm Using My Bible For a Roadmap*, *John Henry* plus a funny sketch called "*Where is That Chord*" the 60 minute DVD was a wonderful trip back into the golden age of bluegrass.





Photo taken just seconds before Bob became known as the "One Eyed Banjo Player"



Attempting one of the most difficult plays in the game of baseball. Stealing a bass.

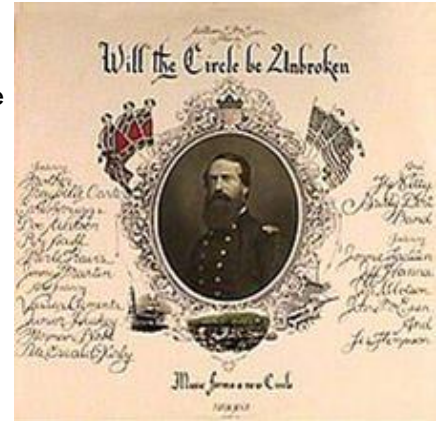


Bluegrass Artists- Past & Present by Grant Miner

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

It has been said that the *"Will The Circle Be Unbroken"* album (3 record set) is one of the most influential musical works in American history. That is quite a claim to make. Here is a little bit of background on the band, the album, and THE song.

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" was a popular Christian hymn written in 1907 by Ada R. Habershon with music by Charles H. Gabriel. In 1935 **The Carter Family** released *"Can the Circle Be Unbroken (By and By)"* which was a country/folk song reworked by A. P. Carter. In 1936 Bill & Charlie Monroe recorded a different version. The song's lyrics concern the death, funeral, and mourning of the narrator's mother.



The **NGDB** was founded in California by singer-guitarist Jeff Hanna and singer-songwriter guitarist Bruce Kunke. As the band developed, they got the idea to go to Nashville to record with some living legends. Earl Scruggs helped the band recruit Roy Acuff, Jimmy Martin, Pete "Oswald" Kirby, Norman Blake and Mother Maybelle Carter, amongst others. All the tracks on the album were recorded on the 1st or 2nd take straight to two-track masters. Another tape ran during the sessions and captured the banter between the performers. From these studio sessions, *"Will The Circle Be Unbroken"* was born.

The album was nominated for two 1973 Grammy awards including Best Country & Western Vocal Performance – Duo Or Group for the A.P. Carter title song. Their ground breaking *"Will The Circle Be Unbroken"* album has been inducted into the U.S. Library of Congress as well as the Grammy Hall of Fame. A volume II was released in 1989. Both albums are loaded with stars from bluegrass, country and contemporary music. It is like listening to history put to music.

The **NGDB** just celebrated its 50th year - that's right 50 years, and they are still touring. A quote from their website about how they lasted so long, "Jeff Hanna, John McEuen, drummer Jimmie Fadden and keyboard player Bob Carpenter went at it with a collective mentality, clearly placing the needs of the material and the band itself - not to mention a parade of guests - above their own satisfaction. They were all in the spotlight, but none tried to dominate it." Another comment by the band about their 50 years, "It's marking an uncommon milestone at five decades, holding the group together because what it's doing collectively is so much more satisfying than anything its members could have done alone." "The lifestyle has changed," says Hanna, comparing road life in 2016 with 1966. "There's different versions of being on the road in your 20s than when you're in your 60s. But it's something we all love to do. We really all love playing live more than anything."

"Will The Circle Be Unbroken" is a song that has the potential to bring a tear to your eye when it is sung at the right venue at the right time. For example, the first time singing it with fellow musicians at Camp HeHoHa on an early Sunday afternoon in October, after three days of playing together, is something that will stick with me. I heard and played it as far away as Florida and Vancouver Island. At a mid-May jam at Pleasantview Hall our President, Ron Mercer, kicked off the jam with this song. Knowing Ron, he likely felt that the mood was just right to sing and play it at that time. Is it over-played? Perhaps. But for those of you who are dedicated to bluegrass it is a "hymn" that means something.

Worth Remembering...

You know, for most of its life, bluegrass has had this stigma of being all straw hats and hay bales and not necessarily the most sophisticated form of music. Yet you can't help responding to its honesty. It's music that finds its way deep into your soul because its strings vibrate against wood and nothing else.

Alison Krauss



I had some good teachers. One of the greatest teachers I've had is bluegrass music: going back and listening to Bill Monroe's music, the Stanley Brothers, Flatt and Scruggs. When I was with Ralph Stanley, I learned a lot from him.

Ricky Skaggs

Soon, the Boov was in the Ghost suit and Pig was in the car, which would have been a good lyric for a bluegrass song, now that I come to think of it.

Adam Rex



Bluegrass is wonderful music. I'm glad I originated it.

Bill Monroe



It seems like bluegrass people have more great stories to tell than other musicians.

Dan Fogelberg



I tell them, 'I think it's quite hot.' They call it a trend, but if it is a trend it's been going for longer than I can remember. It's the music I grew up on as a country boy, and there's nothing else like it. It's nice to see the city folk are catching up.

Ralph Stanley



That's what I love about Nashville and the music community—seeing kids around acoustic music and bluegrass picking parties is the best.

Dierks Bentley

Upcoming Concerts and Festivals in Alberta

- July 1 **The Bix Mix Boys** at the Provincial Legislature 1:00 - 2:00
 July 1 **Back Porch Swing** at the Wild Oats and Notes Festival, Tofield
 July 1 **Whitemud Drive** at the Holden Agricultural Fair 5:00 - 7:00 pm, Holden
 July 4 **Back Porch Swing** at The Works Festival, Edmonton 6:15 pm
 July 8-10 Boscombe Hillbilly Jam (East of Ashmont on High 28)
 July 15-17 **Back Porch Swing** at The Willows Festival, New Norway
 July 21-24 Calgary Folk Festival
 July 29-31 Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Festival (Stony Plain) **Prairie Sky** on stage
- August 6-9 Edmonton Folk Festival
 August 12,13 Come By The Hills Music Festival (Mistahia near Wainwright)
 Aug., 12-14 Northern Lights Bluegrass Festival, Ness Creek (near Big River) Saskatchewan
 August 19-21 **The Bitter Green** at Shady Grove Bluegrass Festival (Nanton)
- Sept. 30 **Back Porch Swing** at The Bailey Theatre, Camrose 7:30
- Oct. 14 **Back Porch Swing** at The Carrot, Edmonton 7:00

Workshops and Camps

- July 3-9 Hotchkiss Guitar Camp (Manning, Alberta)
 July 17-22 Camp Calvin Week 1
- July 23-27 Camp Calvin Week 2 (St. Edouard, Alberta)
- August 15-19 Northern Lights Bluegrass & Old Time Camp, Ness Creek, Saskatchewan)
 August 21-27 or 28- Sept. 2 Nimblefingers Bluegrass & Old Time Camp (Sorrento, BC)
- Sept. 14-19 Monroe Mandolin Camp (Nashville, Tennessee)
 Oct. 14-16 NBCMS Fall Workshop (Camp He Ho Ha)
- Nov. 10-13 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**