

The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society

Bluegrass Newsletter

Spring 2017



Annual General Meeting

On February 8, we held our Annual General Meeting and Carolyn Hotte handled the nomination/election portion of the meeting like a professional. It was almost like she had done this about 12 times before.

Financially, our club is in great shape as our books were scrutinized by the membership. **Steve Schroeter** stepped down as Equipment Director and was replaced by **Bob Whaling**. Bob held this position in the past for a few years so there will not be a steep learning curve for him.

Frank Omoe and Grant Miner bade a fond farewell as Co-Editors of the Newsletter. Erna Dominey accepted the nomination for Newsletter Director. I'm sure the boys will help her out as she prepares the summer 2017 edition. Grant and Frank will prepare the Spring 2017 newsletter as their last collaborative effort.

The rest of the executive remains the same by unanimous votes. Here is a great shot of the Executive. Check out page 4 for a list of the Executive members names and roles.

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Ronnie's Ramblin's by NBCMS President Ron Mercer



Dear Fellow Bluegrassers,

I was at a friend's home recording studio a few days ago. Here is a picture at "take 63" as I once again destroy the intro and count-in. Luckily my buddy Howie "one take" Bergeron offered to step in and help us out. But enough about me and my dobro diatribes. It is an exciting time for our Northern Circle Bluegrass club.

In addition to the AGM and election, here is what else is going on. Our first mission is to have an "Executive Retreat" where each director brainstorms and come up with our direction for NBCMS 2017/2018.

I am constantly surveying the membership about their ideas and wishes for the club. I will keep these in mind as we plan the year's activities.

As some of you may have heard, the **Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Society** reached out to our Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society and asked for some assistance. Their board lost 4 members including Norm Sliter. I organized a meeting with the who's who in bluegrass and community leaders where we could contribute ideas and advice. It was simply humbling. The amount of talent, experience and compassion that everyone there contributed was overwhelming. Fast forward from that meeting and Anna Somerville is now President of the BBCMS with Darcy Whiteside as Vice President. There are some exciting new directions for Blueberry in 2017 and I hope to be included in some of them. Please be prepared to be asked to volunteer for some of the many jobs the August Blueberry long weekend will have available.

I have also been seen playing ukulele around town. It's true. I even had my friend Bruce Ziff give me a clawhammer ukulele lesson. As I look at the blossoming ukulele community I see mostly entry level players discovering a musical instrument for the first time. My ultimate, nefarious plan is to introduce them to dobros, mandolins, guitars and maybe even the mighty 5 string banjo. It will take time but I already see a few converts at our Bluegrass 101 sessions. I have time and I will succeed at getting more uke players to add a bluegrass instrument to their repertoire.

Anyway, I'm off to a bluegrass jam session so I'll talk to you all later.

Ronnie

Co-Editors Final Message by Frank Omoe & Grant Miner



After handling the club's Newsletter for over two years, we jointly decided to pass the torch to someone new. We really enjoyed helping out the club and working with the various contributors who helped us put together each publication. It was a challenge in that we put together most publications while living thousands of kilometers apart. With lots of help from many members, it always seemed to come together. We look forward to remaining involved as active members of the NBCMS and we would like to wish Erna all the best in her role as Newsletter Director. We hope she has as much fun as we did.

Hello From the New Editor

By Erna Dominey

Dear Readers,

My first order of business is to thank the outgoing editors, Frank Omoe and Grant Miner, for building this newsletter into an engaging source of substantial bluegrass news, reviews, opinions and opportunities. Yes, I have big editorial shoes to fill (and two pairs of them!), but I promise to do my best.



I bring to the job a strong background in editing, so never be shy about contributing to your newsletter. Point form is just fine, and we have no minimum word count. Of course I expect to write my own articles, so please let me know about anything you think will interest our members. Heard a great new bluegrass CD? Tell me about it. Just attended a concert, good or not so? Send me your comments. And don't forget the photos, stickers, handbills - any graphics to illustrate the story. The features Frank and Grant established will continue, but I am open to ideas for new ones. Remember, this newsletter exists to serve *your* bluegrass needs. Let me know what they are.

While new to the NBCMS, I was introduced to bluegrass as a teenager. At Edmonton's Hovel music club, I thrilled to the bluegrass stylings of the Good Brothers and a version of the Dillards. And I heard the local band Glory Hills enough to remember the words of "I'll Fly Away" to this day. Editing this newsletter is the perfect means of (re)connecting with kindred spirits to preserve, promote and present bluegrass. Maybe even sing along?

I look forward to communicating with all of you - in person, at the jams and through my email address below. Please be in touch, and let's keep the Northern Bluegrass Circle unbroken.

Erna Dominey ernad@telus.net

2017 NBCMS Executive & Directors

Ron Mercer President
Sheila Hallett Vice President
Jason Baldwin Treasurer
Leonard Swanson Secretary

Gene ZwozdeskyAdvertising Director and Concert DirectorKinley MillerMembership & Merchandise DirectorShawn RobinsonWebsite DirectorMarlene ThompsonFront of House

Anna Somerville Workshop Director
Erna Dominey Newsletter Director
Bob Whaling Equipment Director

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

Molly Tuttle Swings Through Town by Jim Malmberg



Molly Tuttle gave a fabulous performance at Edmonton's Winterfest 2017. She was a highlight of the festival for me. Her voice was lovely, and her flatpicking style justified the recent IBMA Momentum Award in the instrumental category. She even played a few clawhammer guitar numbers. Watch for her new EP, which should be released this fall.

(Editor Comment:

If you are not familiar with Molly Tuttle, we suggest that you go to her website to take in some of her video clips, or check out her work that appears on Youtube. As a member of the very talented Tuttle family, she will be a bluegrass fixture for years to come.)

WINTER JAM CAMP at CAMP HE HO HA - 2017

For those of you who attended the camp, here are a few memories - good friends, good playing, and good food. According to our President this was one terrific weekend of jamming. Is there a better way to forget about winter?











WINTER JAM CAMP at CAMP HE HO HA - 2017



Good Food

Good Friends

Good Times



A beautiful setting where we make our own music, entertain each other until sunrise, and of course we block off the calendar to save the date for the next Winter Jam





The following announcement was made in Feb, 2017 ...

The Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Society is gearing up for another great Festival in 2017 and is excited to be announcing the line-up in the next few weeks. Be sure to join us **August 4, 5 & 6** as we celebrate our passion for music.

The Society is pleased to welcome Anna Somerville as incoming President. She brings to the role a deep commitment to the music community of Edmonton and area, as well as many years of experience and training in bluegrass music leadership and development.

Outgoing President Norm Sliter has stepped down after serving on the Blueberry Bluegrass Music Festival Society for many years. Dawn MacLean (Treasurer), and Barry McKee (Site Manager) have also stepped down from their positions. Blueberry and the bluegrass community would like to sincerely thank Norm, Dawn and Barry for their hard work and dedication in bringing some of the world's best bluegrass and country artists to Alberta, and for the successful running of one of Canada's largest bluegrass festivals.

Organizers are also grateful for the ongoing enthusiasm and involvement of the bluegrass and broader music community. The Northern Bluegrass Circle Music Society, Uptown Folk Club, Edmonton Folk Music Festival, Salmon Arm Roots and Blues Festival and the Foothills Bluegrass Music Society, as well as many individuals in the community at large, have indicated their ongoing commitment to ensure the success of the Blueberry Festival.

Meetings held February 10 and 11 resulted in a new Blueberry Bluegrass Board of Directors: President: **Anna Somerville**, Vice-President: **Darcy Whiteside**, Treasurer: **Bernie MacLellan**, Secretary: **Bill Donlevy**, and Directors **Bill Brasko**, **Heather Donlevy**, **Carolyn Hotte**, **Lynne Ness** and **Gene Zwozdesky**.



The new Board of Directors is already busy with preparations for another great weekend of bluegrass music. We thank everyone who has been a part of this Festival - from the fans, to the volunteers, to the past performers. We also thank you for your patience as we feverishly plan the 2017 Festival.

Please stay tuned for some exciting announcements, and keep August 4th, 5th and 6th open in your calendar. Visit http://blueberrybluegrass.com in the coming weeks to keep up-to-date and find out how you can get involved.

Sincerely,

Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Society Festival Board of Directors

More Great "Blueberry" News by Anna Somerville

The Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Festival is going to be an event you won't want to miss this year. There is so much to tell you about. The new Board has expanded the Festival onto three stages and is making plans to utilize every available space at the festival site in Stony Plain.

The 2017 lineup is a mix of Bluegrass, Country and Old Time music. We are confident these high caliber performers will keep you entertained on every stage throughout the weekend.

Calling all jammers!... Come to Blueberry! Every effort is being made to revive jamming at the festival. Scheduled jams will occur at various times and places throughout the weekend. Jamming tents will make it easier to find one another as will the shutting down of the Outdoor Stage earlier on Friday and Saturday night.

The new Indoor Stage can seat 500 so we are no longer dependent on the weather to continue. As well as presenting scheduled performances all weekend, the Indoor Stage will host Country Dances both Friday and Saturday nights. The Pioneer Museum will play a larger role at this year's festival. We also have plans to use the riding ring & corrals on site and to provide programming that will appeal to families, such as a petting zoo and outdoor farm fair arcade.

This is the year to attend Blueberry! Members of the new festival board are tied to the community. Our plan is to present a festival that encourages everyone to come on out and support it. Give us a chance to show you what we envision for the 2017 Bluegrass and Country Music Festival.

Check out the ticket prices this year...we have lowered them! Myhre's Music has the Early Bird 3-Day Passes for \$110 available for purchase at the store as well as Raffle Tickets for a Martin Guitar. This year Early Bird 3-Day Pass ticket holders can hand in their ticket, once they get to the festival, in exchange for a raffle ticket for that Martin Guitar.



Please go to www.BlueberryBluegrass.com to purchase tickets on-line and find out what's happening this year

Get involved...volunteer for Blueberry! Volunteers who commit to 15 hours will get a weekend pass and meals.

Some of the jobs include:

Front Gate, Information Booth, Raffle ticket booth, 50/50 ticket sellers, lending a hand at the Pioneer Museum, helping with the outdoor arcade, and setting up and tearing down the site. Send us an email, get involved.

Anna Somerville President Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Society

Bluegrass Artists Past & Present by Grant Miner

Blue Highway

It seems timely to write a short article about Blue Highway since they were voted the **Favourite Bluegrass Artist of All Time** by the readers of **Bluegrass Today** in April 2016.

In addition, this highly accomplished band has won 25 IBMA awards and two Grammy nominations. Certainly, it is a band worthy of some attention.



The band has been around for 22 years and in 2016 they released their 11th studio album, "Original Traditional." In a matter of weeks a single from this new album, "Wilkes County Clay," hit number 1 on the bluegrass charts. The entire album is composed of original material but each song claims to have the "sound of a much earlier time." Hence the bold album cover title. As for the band members, you will recognize a few even if you have only been playing for a few years, with names such as Rob Ickes and Tom Adams for example:

Current Members

Jason Burleson - banjo, guitar, mandolin Shawn Lane - mandolin, fiddle, guitar, vocals Tim Stafford - guitar, vocals Wayne Taylor - upright bass, vocals Gaven Largent - resonator guitar, vocals

Former Members

Rob Ickes - resonator guitar Tom Adams - banjo

Stafford was playing with Alison Krauss and Union Station when they won IBMA Entertainer of the Year in 1991. He then formed "Blue Highway" in 1994. He is an accomplished songwriter who won the 2014 IBMA Songwriter of the Year honours. Burleson was an original founding member and his playing has been described as "Bad to the Bluegrass Bone." Ickes played with the band for 21 years before heading out to new ventures. Largent, the new resonator guitar player, has been playing bluegrass since age 8 and is a multi-instrumentalist (surprise!). Taylor is another founding member of Blue Highway and his original material has been prominent on past Blue Highway albums. Lane was nominated for the 2015 IBMA Songwriter of the Year, writes his own material, has recorded solo albums and at times plays with The Earls of Leicester.

With that alignment of experience and talent it should be no surprise that these guys can produce some great music. Give them a listen.

Karaoke.....Bluegrass Style by Erna Dominey



For my first article in this newsletter, I intended to cover the visit (in February!) of the beloved Slocan Ramblers to Pleasantview and Allendale. But when I tried writing about their concert at the New Moon Folk club and the first karaoke event ever held at a NBCMS Wednesday night jam, I fell into a dark hollow.

A well-written article can make readers feel sorry they missed the gig, but what can a newcomer to the circle like me possibly say about these bluegrass happenings? To carry on the tradition of Grant and Frank, I need more bluegrass education PDQ. The acoustic music workshop in the fall was enlightening, but Bluegrass 101 seems a stretch. I've listened to Prairie Pickin' on CJSR for donkey's years, and to CKUA's bluegrass show through its changes of host and title. Even so, I just don't know enough to convey the full impact of the Slocan Ramblers.

Take a look at Ron Mercer, shown here in his bluegrass finery doing "House of Gold" with, perhaps, the best backup band of his life. Now think back to the peak bluegrass experiences in your life, on stage or in the audience. How did you recognize them? I believe all readers of this newsletter have their own "Monroe Scale" to use in such moments, but may not have given it much thought. That's where I hope to be of service.

Where would you like to see the newsletter go, and what should it do on its way there? Any feedback I get will help me write or otherwise procure stories that'll be sure to interest you.

As I learn what readers - club members or not- want to know about bluegrass events like the return of the Ramblers, my articles will write themselves. Until then, I can tell you they outdid themselves at their concert and that we can all look forward to the next bluegrass karaoke night.

by Grant Miner

Frailing/Clawhammer Banjo



At jams, we most frequently see the banjo played using the finger picking style (Scrugg's style) but we also encounter players using the Clawhammer or Frailing style of playing. I thought it might be interesting to explore this method of banjo playing even though I do not play banjo myself (well ok, I can play the G chord and might limp through a beginner version of Cripple Creek).

The clawhammer style is the traditional style of the early Appalachian Mountain musicians. Using the finger-picking style, the banjo is played with a down stroke with the thumb and up strokes with the index and middle fingers (with metal or plastic picks). However with clawhammer style, the primary method used is down strokes with the thumb and fingers. As well with clawhammer, the hand the assumes a claw-like shape and the strumming finger is kept fairly stiff, striking the strings by the motion of the hand at the wrist and/or elbow, rather than a flicking motion by the finger. Only the thumb and middle or index finger are used and the finger always picks downward, hitting the string with the back of the fingernail. This unique position and motion produces rhythm, percussion, melody and harmony if played well. Another unusual characteristic is that the thumb does not pick the "down-beat" as with other instruments.

Often frailing and clawhammer are considered to be the same but with frailing it is assumed that the player is always picking the G string as a drone whereas with clawhammer, the thumb picks other strings (known as drop thumbing). A basic way to describe the picking & strumming style is the "bum-ditty" which can be can be broken down into these three simple movements:

- 1. BUM -- Play one of the first 4 strings with your middle (or index) finger. This is a quarter note.
- 2. DIT -- Strum with the back of your middle (or index) fingernail. This is an eighth note. TY -- Pluck the 5th string with your thumb. This is an eighth note.

The banjo used for this style of playing has an open back (and often seems to have a well-worn banjo head, you know that part that used to be white or near-white). In any event the addition of clawhammer or frailing banjo adds a very distinctive old-time sound to any bluegrass jam. This short article is just an introduction to this style of playing. We have a few banjo experts associated with the club so if you are interested please ask one of them for more details. Who knows maybe you will catch the bug!

The Strawflowers Edmonton's Newest Old - Time Stringband

by Frank Omoe





The band began as three flowers: Bruce Ziff, Pamela Johnson, and Genoa Porteous. Almost from the beginning it began taking the form of a musical collective, with the occasional flower stepping in to play at events such as church corn roasts and senior centres. Once a Strawflower, always a Strawflower!

Bruce and Pamela met Jose Mejia, Hannah Goa, and Toby Tellier in the summer of 2016. They started busking at the Strathcona Farmers Market. The Strawflowers played their first gig in October 2016 for Rachel Notley's constituency party. It was a treat to see the Premier of Alberta dancing to St. Anne's Reel!

With an interest in playing and spreading the good news of Appalachian old time music, The Strawflowers are happiest when the fiddle and banjo are in lockstep. They can be heard playing an array of music from the archives of Tommy Jarrell to Hazel Dickens to John Hartford.

Bruce Ziff – claw-hammer banjo, jaw harp, dojo, bodhran and the infamous dancing pair Jack and Olive (the band's wooden cloggers)

Pamela Johnson – a solid rhythm guitar player with a heart full of love for singing the songs.

Hannah Goa - fiddle and vocals

Toby Tellier - upright bass and vocals

Jose Mejia – the wildflower; they are not sure where he comes from or where he's going but he picked up a dobro last summer, liked it a whole lot, and the rest is history.

Alex Boudreau – the newest flower. Alex joins The Strawflowers with his sweet harmony voice and melodious mandolin playing.

The Strawflowers play garden parties, barn raisings or jammin'! Check them out at the Strathcona Farmers Market on Saturdays and on Facebook or www.thestrawflowers.com Their next big event will be the "Spring Fling," slated for Sunday May 28, 2017, from 4:00 to 7:00 pm. It features a Strawflowers concert and dance, with Special Guests, followed by a jam. Location: Riverdale House. Contact Pamela at 780-633 -6941 for tickets or email: howdy@thestrawflowers.com.



Local Bluegrass Bands

We are proud to provide our readers with a list of the local bands who are dedicated to playing bluegrass music or at least *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:

Back Porch Swing website: backporchswing.ca

The Bix Mix Boys website: www.thebixmixboys.ca

Cabin Fever Band contact Patrick Guidera (780) 235-8671

Kayla Hotte and her Rodeo Pals website: therodeopals.com

Prairie Sky contact Sheila Hallett (780) 488-9401 or galbanjo@telus.net

The Strawflowers contact Pamela Johnson howdy@thestrawflowers.com.

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 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	(ADDIED DE LEGIS)
Marc Ladouceur	mandolin, guitar	(780) 221-3464	
Ron Mercer	banjo	(780) 488-5256	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
Kayla Hotte	voice, fiddle, rhythm guitar	(780) 940-3375	The same of the sa
Troy Gates	fiddle	(780) 998-4817	AND THE PARTY OF T
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 Erna at ernad@telus.net.

Upcoming Concerts and Festivals in Alberta

- May 21 The Cabin Fever Band Radway Festival of Stars
- May 28 The Strawflowers "Spring Fling," concert and dance, with Special Guests, followed by a jam. Location: Riverdale House. Contact Pamela at 780-633-6941 for tickets or email: howdy@thestrawflowers.com.

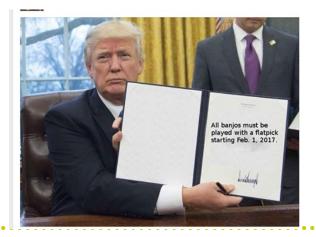
For Your Enjoyment

What's the best and fastest way to tune a banjo?
Wire cutters

How many bluegrass pickers does it take to change a light bulb?

Five....one to change the bulb and four to complain because it's electric!







Workshops and Camps

The Acoustic Music Workshop by Anna Somerville October 13 - 15, 2017

Another workshop to look forward to. We have lots of ideas and suggestions to call upon when building the workshop each year. Thanks to everyone who offered suggestions and requests for instructors. It's important that we bring in musicians you want to spend time learning from and jamming with. Please register and encourage a friend to join you this year.

The Acoustic Music Workshop is an opportunity not to be missed. It's a weekend focused on music. All you have to do is show up. This year I am enjoying the new position of president of the Blueberry Bluegrass & Country Music Society. The privilege of playing a part in presenting a festival will not change my commitment to the Acoustic Music Workshop offered by the NBCMS. I may need a little more help this year but my interest in the workshop remains unchanged.

Please contact me with any questions as I am happy to answer them.

Anna Somerville, NBCMS Workshop Director, 780-718-3070.

Foothills Acoustic Music Institute: fami 2017

Here is some brief information about an organization that exists in Alberta, and perhaps you were not aware that it even existed.

fami is a non-profit institute that was first established in 1997. It's mission is to "promote and encourage the learning and playing of acoustic music." It embraces all genres of music, including bluegrass. Each year they host **instructional camps** in May and Aug and a **jam camp** in late September or early August.

Ron Mercer is teaching three workshops for *fami* during the summer and will be serving as an instructor at the *fami* workshop in August, 2017. We encourage all NBCMS members to visit the *fami* website and learn more about this organization and the workshops that they offer. It certainly appears that *fami* and the **NBCMS** share very similar goals with regard to acoustic music.

For more information about the organization and their workshops go to www.fami.ca

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



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 still taking place 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 say 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. Bluegrass 101 is great way to have fun and further your playing.

Songs for late spring sessions:

Somehow Tonight - Flatt and Scruggs Handsome Molly - Stanley Brothers It Hurts To Know - Osborne Brothers Hello City Limits - Red Allen and the Kentuckians Old Home Place - JD Crowe and New South Your Love is Like a Flower - Flatt and Scruggs Molly and Tenbrooks - Bill Monroe

Myhre's Music

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