

Old-Time Times

FEBRUARY 2005

In This Issue

Events, pg 1 **4th-Sunday Jams**, pg 1 February's 4th-Sunday Jam, pg 2
Art Stamper Passes Away, pg 2 A Tribute to the Late Ralph Blizard, pg 2
A Short History of Breakin' Up Winter, pg 3 Alan Jabbour Headlines This Year's
BUW, pg 4 "The Girl I Left Behind Me," pg 5 Old-Time Singing School, pg 6
A Penny Learned, pg 6 **Newsletter Info**, pg 6&7

EVENTS

Tennessee

Old-Time Singing School

Held in Madison on February 5 at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on Old Hickory Boulevard. For more information, read the article entitled "Old-Time Singing School" in this edition of the newsletter or call Dave Cannon at 615-868-9842.

Breakin' Up Winter

Held in Cedars of Lebanon State Park near Lebanon on March 4, 5, and 6 (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). This festival is dedicated to old-time music. The honored guests include Charlie Acuff, Roby Cogswell, Chrissy Davis-Camp, Martin Fisher, Bill Mansfield, Carol Ponder, Charles Wolfe, and the world-famous fiddler and musicologist Alan Jabbour. For complete information, go to the NOTSBA Web site, www.nashvilleoldtime.org.

Additional articles concerning Breakin' Up Winter appear in this edition of the newsletter.

Alabama

McFarland Mall Fiddlin' and Bluegrass Contest

Held in Tuscaloosa at the McFarland Mall on February 18 and 19. For more information, call 205-759-5161 or go to "Festivals & Contests" at www.nashvilleoldtime.org.

Hosts Needed for 4th-Sunday Jams

Please E-mail Darlyne Kent to schedule your home for a 2005 4th-Sunday Jam. We still need homes for the following months:

June, July, August, and October

Some of the summer 4th-Sunday jams may be held in area parks. We tried that last summer, and it was well received. If you are willing to host

(continued from page 1)

a jam, you might first think of October.

Darlyne's E-mail address is
dkent@davidsonacademy.com.

February's Fourth-Sunday Jam

February's 4th-Sunday Jam will be hosted by Don and Darlyne Kent. If you need directions to their home, please talk to anyone who attends these jams regularly.

Art Stamper Passes Away

Art Stamper, a great Appalachian fiddler, husband, father, grandfather, friend to many, and fiddler to all, passed away at 9:20 PM, Sunday, January 23, 2005, with family and friends at his side.

Art, who fought a valiant battle against cancer, was up and around on Saturday. On Sunday, he did not fully awaken, and he was transported Sunday afternoon to the hospice ward of Norton Audubon Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky, where he died peacefully seven hours later.

On Wednesday, January 26, Danna Stamper, Ed Gregory, and Phil Sparks went to his funeral, which was held near Shepherdsville, Kentucky, just south of Louisville. Although a few words of comfort were offered by a minister, most of the service was musical. Kay, his wife, sang "Nearer My God to Thee," and many of his longtime friends offered songs and tunes of their own. Others listened or joined jams in other areas of the funeral home.

At one point in the service, his friends were given an opportunity to reminisce about Art's life and times. Several stories dealt with Art's ability to play on and on, even when his friends were exhausted and wanted to sleep. One told of the time when his sleepy friends hid his fiddle. Art just sat around for several more hours, saying things like "Remember this one?" and then he made his voice sound like a fiddle as he knocked out tune after tune.

We will miss Art terribly, but we are so thankful that we had him and that we still have his recorded music.

~Ed Gregory and Phil Sparks

A Tribute to the Late Ralph Blizard:

Gentlemanly Old-Time Fiddler

The world of traditional old-time music lost one of its greatest musicians and foremost advocates when Ralph Blizard departed this earth on December 3. The beloved fiddler and champion of this musical genre died at his Blountville, Tennessee, residence just two days shy of his eighty-sixth birthday.

As a seven-year-old, initially against his father's will, Blizard learned the long-bow technique from observing such notables as Charlie Bowman, John Dykes, and Dudley Vance, frequent visitors to his parents' home. While still in high school, he led his own band, became a fixture on two local radio stations, and was a primary reason for their live broadcasts' success. Later, a combination of holding down a full-time job, operating a farm, and functioning as husband/father led the family-centered young man to distance himself from the music world. Touring had become a thief of valuable time and a burden instead of a pleasure.

Fortunately for his many fans, Ralph's absence from playing was not permanent. In prepping for his career's resurrection, he privately used headphones and a stereo system, often practicing for as long as seven hours per day. For much of that time he was listening to recordings of the Delmore Brothers or Arthur Smith, a renowned fiddler with whom he had shared the same stage.

Although Blizard was away from the music scene for a quarter of a century, his return in 1980 was remarkable. He garnered more than a few honors, traveled internationally, and endeared himself to four generations of fans who were impressed by his musicianship and charitable nature. His popularity prompted news of his death to be reported by nearly 2000 media outlets worldwide.

Blizard's honors are legion: recipient of the Music Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Tennessee Governor's Award for the Arts; induction into the North American Fiddlers Hall of Fame; guest entertainer for the Smithsonian Folk Festival, Tampa Center for the Performing Arts, Library of Congress, Merlefest, Wolf

Trap, and ABC-TV's Fourth of July Celebration—to name a few.

Throughout his productive life, the gentlemanly entertainer did more than his share of giving. He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Traditional Appalachian Musical Heritage Association (TAMHA), an organization he co-founded; a host of the Friday Night Jam, a free weekly event for novice performers and spectators; a volunteer instructor in local schools; a seminar leader at the Swannanoa Gathering at Warren Wilson College and numerous similar festivals; and as a major force in bringing All-American Cities status to his community.

Survivors include his widow, Mildred Bowman Blizzard, two sons, David and Mark, and their respective wives. In addition to his myriad of fans, Ralph also leaves behind his close-knit string band, the New Southern Ramblers, who participated in his funeral: regulars Phil Jamison, Gordie Hanners, and John Herrmann as well as former member and occasional guest, John Lilly. Fortunately, his music will live on through his videotapes, audio cassettes, and compact disks.

Herbert Ralph Blizzard was one of my dearest friends. While most of his admirers saw a graceful fiddler on stage, I had the privilege of observing up-close a gracious human being. During my tenure as TAMHA's first president, he faithfully called me between monthly meetings, offering encouragement and support. Even within recent weeks, when his condition became extremely critical, in his characteristic unselfish manner, Ralph always manifested more concern for my health than for his own. To the very end, he also maintained lofty aspirations for TAMHA, the Friday Night Jam, and similar organizations and events.

For those so inclined, at the family's suggestion, memorial gifts may be sent to the Ralph Blizzard Music Scholarship Fund, Warren Wilson College, PO Box 9000, Asheville, NC 28815-9000. Moreover, Ralph would undoubtedly be appreciative of broad-based support of traditional old-time music,

the kind he enthusiastically preserved, performed, and promoted.

~James D. Bowman, Ph.D.

Dr. James D. Bowman, a retired professor, is now an educational consultant and a freelance writer living in Gray, Tennessee. He is a nephew of the late Fiddlin' Charlie Bowman and was first president of TAMHA. Dr. Bowman can be contacted at JDBteach@yahoo.com

A Short History of Breakin' Up Winter

The idea for Breakin Up Winter actually began with a desire to recreate the good feelings generated by a weekend gathering at Spider and Betty Dowell's house in Athens, Alabama. Eleven years ago, during the weekend of the Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention in Athens, we played music with friends from Birmingham and Huntsville, ate a lot, talked a lot, and just generally enjoyed being together.

David and I had worked on Tennessee Grassroots Days, and after that festival's demise, we often said that we would like to work on another festival. The Nashville Old-time String Band Association gave us that opportunity.

The first Breakin' Up Winter was informal and small, with all events held in the Cedar Forest Lodge and all meals "pot luck" style. We had the support of Buddy Ingram, who had organized the Tennessee Banjo Institute in the past, and he was invaluable in starting us out at Cedars of Lebanon, "his" state park. Also we had the support and blessing of Carl Myers of Metro's Community Education Department.

We started calling friends from Alabama and other areas of the South, and members of the String Band Association pitched in to make plans. We rented only a few cabins and tried to put compatible folks in cabins together. Charlie and Dorothy Acuff agreed to come from Alcoa, and we were able to have a dance with the help of the Nashville Country Dance Group. The weekend turned out to be great fun and we lost only a little money, which some of our stalwart members, Mary Durham, Pat Gill, and the Cannons, made up.

The planning for the next event began soon after, and we agreed that we would try to keep it small to keep the informal feeling and not let it be too much work.

We have been fortunate to have the support of people who are masters in their fields: Dr. Charles Wolfe, who is a prolific author and scholar; Roby Cogswell, state director of Folk Arts; Martin Fisher, who has taught us about “old-time” recording techniques; and many guest presenters and musicians through the years. We have been able to hear Will Keys play the banjo and marvel at his technique, listen to Jim Griffith lead our Sunday morning hymn sing, eat the great home cooking of Natalie and her daughter Wanda, learn from George Gruhn about vintage instruments and from John Kelley about how not to injure our body parts while playing old-time music. We have talented people to step in when we were short a presenter, as Carol Ponder did this past year.

We have made so many memories over the past ten years: the infamous Cabin Number Nine, Doc Wilhite cooking his country ham while impeccably dressed in an outfit that would have made Uncle Dave proud, and the times we declared we could not play another note and then had to settle back for “one more tune.”

We have lost friends that were dear to us: Michael McCanless, who could play “Three Thin Dimes” at the speed of light; Bill Rust, a gentleman and a banjo collector; and Don Sarrell, who never missed an opportunity to play a tune or make a friend.

We have worked together with friends from the String Band Association who always say “What can I do to help?” People like Don and Darlyne Kent, and those who just pitch in, the Fishers who feed us on Friday, and Mary Dean Wolfe and all the others who put out the food for the covered-dish dinner. There are friends who move the tables and chairs and set up and take down for the various presentations. All of this is done in a spirit of good will and has made me say over the years that old-time musicians are the best people to be around.

The best part about BUW is that you never know what this year’s or next year’s memories will be. Hopefully, the event will go on for at least another ten years, and maybe someday we can have the festival on the front lawn of “Old-Time Acres”, the rest home with armless rocking chairs on the front porch and an endless supply of old old-time musicians to enjoy our retirement years with!

~Trish Cannon

Alan Jabbour Headlines This Year’s Breakin’ Up Winter

In March of this year, we will indeed be fortunate to enjoy the fiddling and musical insights of Alan Jabbour at Breakin’ Up Winter.

Alan was born in Jacksonville, Florida, and learned to play classical violin, rather well, at an early age. The folk revival of the 60s introduced him to mountain music, and he eventually went to Duke University in North Carolina to study English and, later, to obtain a PhD in folk music.

From Duke, he went to UCLA to teach and then, in 1969, moved on to Washington, DC, to head the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress. In 1974, he left that post to become the director of Folk Arts at the National Endowment for the Arts, and in 1976, he returned to the Library of Congress to become the director of the American Folklife Center. He held that position until his retirement in 1999.

As a graduate student, Alan traveled around the Upper South, documenting old-time music. During this time, he absorbed the music of many of the old-time fiddlers he met, especially Henry Reed (1884–1968), a superb fiddler who lived in Glen Lyn, Virginia, near the West Virginia line.

Alan’s shift from violinist to fiddler was not entirely a smooth one. He writes of how, early on, the fiddlers’ habit of stamping their feet while playing irritated him—until he came to realize that it was part and parcel of the music.

The style of bowing he learned is highly syncopated, a result of African-American influences, and his tunes, even his favorite

waltz, "Peekaboo Waltz," are full of the joy that befits energetic dance tunes.

Alan began his career as a performer in the the mid-'60s when he, Tommy Thompson, Bobbie Thompson, and Bertram Levy formed the Hollow Rock String Band. Their fist LP recording, *The Hollow Rock String Band: Traditional Dance Tunes*, was conceived in 1967 and hastily released in 1968. Unfortunately, it was released too late to be heard by Henry Reed, the group's primary creative influence. (The band also acknowledges its indebtedness to many other fiddlers, including Vaughn Marley, Harlan Coble, Lonnie Corsbie, and Ross Miller.)

Shortly after the album was released, Alan moved to California, Bobbie formed the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, Tommy organized the Red Clay Ramblers, and Bertram became a physician and took up the fiddle, banjo, and concertina.

In 1974 a second *Hollow Rock String Band* LP was released and in 1981, a third and final LP, *Sandy's Fancy*, came out. In 2004, these two LPs were re-released as a two-CD set under the title *Hollow Rock Legacy*.

In 2002, Alan released his most recent recording, *A Henry Reed Reunion*. This time, James Reed, Henry Reed's son, plays guitar, and Alan's old friend Bertram Levy plays concertina and banjo. This CD is dedicated to Henry and includes such tunes as "George Booker," "High Yellow," "Hell Among the Yearlings," "Santa Anna's Retreat," and "Quince Dillion's High-D Tune."

In 2004, Alan released his first instructional piece, *Learning Old-Time Fiddle Appalachian Style with Alan Jabbour*. It is a video recording (VHS or DVD) with transcriptions and visual instructions for ten tunes. It focuses on the specific bowing and phrasing techniques underlying his Appalachian fiddle style and is intended for those who already possess the basic skills of violin playing.

Alan has spent his youth and adult life in the service of old-time music. He has sought out and learned hundreds of tunes and has inspired countless members of our generation to practice, practice, practice until we too feel them throbbing in our veins. All of us who know

him and his work eagerly anticipate his arrival at Breakin' Up Winter. ~Phil Sparks

The Story Behind the Tune "The Girl I Left Behind Me"

"The Girl I Left Behind Me" is probably not the oldest old-time tune and song, but it does have a few years on it. For many years in the 1700s and 1800s, the British Army was reasonably successful in "recruiting" (often by the Shanghai fashion) young Irishmen to fight the enemies of the Crown. (The recruiting sergeants' tactics themselves were notorious and gave rise to such humorous songs as "Arthur McBride.") Anyway, thousands of impoverished Irish boys were "saved" from a presumed life of drinking and joblessness in exchange for the opportunity to wear bright red uniforms with shiny buttons as frontline infantry and be shot at by the enemies of the British Crown.

"The Girl I Left Behind Me" is an Irish "leave-taking song" about military furlough. The words have been traced back to 1758. They were written by an unknown author in an Irish regiment of the British Army who put them to a 300-year-old Irish melody. In the early (English) version, the lonesome soldier fondly recalls the charms of the French, Italian, Spanish, and Flemish ladies, yet none of these ladies encountered during his military assignments compares favorably "To the Girl I Left Behind Me" back home on Erin's fair isle!

After crossing the Atlantic, the tune and song became Americanized and many new verses were written for the old tune. It continued to epitomize military service and leave taking, but it also became a stage song. One localized stanza goes as follows:

If ever I travel this road again
and tears don't fall behind me,
I'm going back to Tennessee
to meet the girl I left behind me.

The tune and song were later customized and became popular with both armies of the War Between the States. It was employed for, among other things, an enlisting and recruiting song! (Is this contradictory or what? Using a

song about the joy of taking furlough as an army recruiting song! I guess that stranger things have happened.) Another author, Samuel Lover, wrote many other sets of verses to "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

Credits and Sources:

Songs of the Civil War, compiled and edited by Irwin Silber.

The Library of Folk Songs, Amsco Publications.

~Don K.

Old-Time Singing School

Tim Reynolds has consented to do a shape note workshop at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on Old Hickory Boulevard., in Madison on February 5.

For those who are not familiar with shape note singing, also know as "fa so la," it is a teaching method developed in the 1700s to help strengthen music in churches by teaching an easier way to read music. The music is very model and is beautiful in it its own way.

The traditional singing school taught the method in the morning, held a communal dinner on the grounds, and then came back for a singing that lasted into the night. This is what we will be doing.

Tim will have books for sale and books to use as loaners. The books will be \$12 unless he has to have them shipped in. In that case the cost will reflect the shipping.

Tim has also consented to lead the Hymn Sing at BUW this year. As at the workshop, he will have loaners and books for sale. He is planning to have leaders there and will select the more familiar, simpler tunes.

I have taken the liberty to ask Tim to do another Fa So La Workshop on Saturday morning at BUW 2006.

Schedule for the workshop:

- 11:00-12:30 Introduction and learning of the method
- 12:30-1:30 Lunch (covered dish)
- 1:30-2:30 Review of the lesson
- 2:30-5:00 Sing

Tim Reynolds—Biographical Information

Tim is a finish carpenter living in Nashville, Tennessee. He first learned about shape-note singing from his father, William J. Reynolds, a nationally known hymnologist who, for many years was head of the Music Department at the Baptist Sunday School Board and is also Distinguished Professor of Church Music Emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Tim finally got the Sacred Harp bug after college. When his father moved to Texas in 1980, Tim inherited the Sacred Harp singings in Nashville and became the publisher of *The Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp News*, the oldest Sacred Harp newsletter in continuous publication. Currently, he chairs three annual singings in Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

For additional information about the workshop, call me at 615-868-9842

~Dave Cannon

A Penny Learned

Many of us learn the A part and B part of an old-time tune only to discover that for others our B part is their A part and our A part is their B part. This results in occasional misunderstandings.

John Hartford had a way of avoiding that confusion. He referred to the two parts as the "fine part" and the "course part." The "fine part" is the one played on the thinner strings and the "course part" is the one played on the thicker strings.

I don't know what terms he used to discuss tunes with three parts.

~Phil Sparks

Please Contribute to Your Newsletter!

If you have information you want to submit, or if you have ideas for improving the newsletter, contact Phil Sparks.

If you are willing to review a CD, contact Phil Sparks. If you don't contact him, he will contact you!

If you have a tidbit on picking, learning tunes, caring for instruments, etc, please submit it for the "A Penny Learned" article.

HELP!!!! If you know about an upcoming old-time music event, don't assume that we

already know about it. If it's not posted on our Web site (www.nashvilleoldtime.org), we need the information desperately. ***Please help us keep our old-time community informed.***

You can reach Phil at:

ksparks@msn.com

or

(615) 797-4356

or

2020 Claylick Road

White Bluff, TN 37187

The ***submission deadline*** for March's newsletter is ***Monday, February 21.***

Editor's Note: The articles in this newsletter are placed according to when they are submitted. The first article I receive is placed at the top, the second goes next, and so on.