

A Publication
of Your
Nashville
Old-Time
String Band
Association

UPCOMING
ASSOCIATION
EVENTS



Thursday
January 6
Slow Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Stratford High
Cafeteria



Thursday
January 13
Regular Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Stratford High
Cafeteria



January 23
4th-Sunday Jam
2 to 5 PM
Hosted by
Michael Ann and
David
Carpenter,
Christie Burns,
and
Butch Ross

Old-Time Times

JANUARY 2005

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EVENTS

We are not aware of any old-time music events that will take place during the month of January. If you know of one, please send us the information so we can spread the word.

Contact Ed Gregory or Phil Sparks. You can reach Ed at ed@gregorynet.net or 615-650-2341. Phil's contact information is listed at the end of this newsletter.

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 a jam, you might think of October first.

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

DIRECTIONS TO JANUARY'S 4th-SUNDAY JAM

This month's 4th-Sunday Jam will be held in Bowling Green, Kentucky, on the campus of Western Kentucky University. We will meet in the Pioneer Log Cabin, which is immediately next to the Kentucky Building (also called the Kentucky Museum).

From Nashville, take I-65 north to Exit 20, and go west on the William H. Natcher Parkway (formerly the Green River Parkway). From the parkway, take Exit 4 and turn right (north) onto Highway 31-W. (There is a sign for Western Kentucky University at this exit.)

Take 31-W to University Boulevard, and turn left (west). Follow the boulevard to the Kentucky Building (about 4 miles from Exit 4). Visitor Parking is on the left and the right.

CAUTION: You will see The Pioneer Log Cabin just BEFORE you reach the Kentucky Building. After you pass the Kentucky Building, you will see a second cabin, but that's the wrong one.

Dave Cannon Goes on Tour

January will be an interesting and exciting month for Dave Cannon.

New Year's Eve, he and the other members of the Melmac Lickers (Mike Anderson on bass, Mike Baugh on guitar, and Tim Wilson on fiddle) will provide the music for the Birmingham, Alabama, contra dance.

On Saturday, January 8, in Princeton, West Virginia, Dave will hold a banjo work-shop for Glenwood Music and Jewelry. He will offer two sessions, one for beginners and one for intermediate pickers.

January 19 through 23, it's off to Anaheim, California, for the West Coast convention of the National Association of Musical Merchandisers (NAMM).

During that time, on Wednesday, January 15, Dave will travel to Sacramento to hold a two-level banjo workshop for a music shop called The Fifth String.

Immediately after NAMM, on Monday, January 24, he will go to San Diego and hold yet another workshop for Acoustic Expressions.

Finally, on Tuesday, January 25, he will hold workshop in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for High Dessert Guitar.

It will be a busy time, but Dave is looking forward to meeting and working with lots of nice folks. ~Phil Sparks

Tyler Andal Performs at Carnegie Hall

Yes folks, it has finally happened. One of our own has made it to the absolute top. On Friday, December 3, Tyler Andal appeared at the world-renowned Carnegie Hall in New York City as part of a performance entitled *Global Encounters—Sounds of India, Sounds of the United States*.

For the whole story, we have to start back in the Adirondack Mountains, at Old Forge, New York, and the Fox Family Bluegrass Festival. Tyler was performing with The Ryan Holladay Band and was an instructor for the fiddle workshop there when some unknown person of influence was impressed by their music. This led to an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall.

On Wednesday, December 1, Tyler flew

from Nashville to the Newark airport where a limousine whisked him away to the Park Central Hotel. Rehearsals began the next day at 7:45 AM, and Tyler was assigned to Dressing Room Y on Level P.

The entire program was being produced by The Weill Music Institute, which oversees Carnegie Hall's music education programs. This particular performance was designed as a distance learning event connecting 400 New York high school students with 200 of their counterparts in India. The purpose of this 7,300-mile, simulcast cross-cultural exchange was "to create a framework for understanding the geography and music of both countries," and Tyler's job was to represent traditional Appalachian music.

On the morning of Friday, December 3, around 9:30 AM (8 PM in New Deli), Tyler walked on stage. He and his fellow musicians (Ryan Holladay on banjo and mandolin, American Heritage recipient Wayne Henderson on guitar, and Herb Key on bass) played three tunes. Then they were brought back to play two more tunes while some technical problems were being resolved.

At the end of the show, *The New York Times* reports that musicians in New Deli established a beat, Tyler's band matched it, and the New Orleans jazz band quickly joined in. Soon everyone was playing "Sweet Georgia Brown" while Indian dancers twirled, and American students clapped in time.

The audience included not only the high school students in Carnegie Hall and India, but also Carnegie Hall's board of trustees and its chairman.

The show was a complete success. It received an excellent review in the *New York Times*, and the show's manager wrote that the staff and stage hands especially enjoyed the rehearsals involving Tyler and his friends. The most frequent remark, he said, was "Where in the world did you find those guys?"

That night, Tyler and the other members of the Carnegie Hall Acoustic Band were treated to a picking party in Brooklyn where they met and jammed with local old-time musicians. Tyler had a wonderful time. He says that his hosts, the staff, and the other performers

treated them like kings and made them feel completely at home.

Saturday, was reserved for sight seeing: The Empire State Building, Greenwich Village, Washington Square, Rockefeller Center, Times Square, The Ed Sullivan Theater, and Chinatown.

Sunday afternoon, Tyler dashed off to the Airport and caught a flight back to Music City. We can only wonder what will be next. Is it possible that Tyler has peaked at the tender age of 16? I doubt it. Perhaps next year it will be off to London where he will be dubbed "Sir" Tyler. ~Phil Sparks

The Nashville Bluegrass Band and a Free Country Ham

It's always great fun and inspiring musically to listen to the Nashville Bluegrass Band live, but Wednesday night, December 8, was exceptional. They played most (if not all) of the tunes on their new CD, *Twenty Year Blues*, which has been nominated for a Grammy.

That this group includes some of the best acoustic musicians on the planet is a given. But for me, the highlight of the night (other than Stuart Duncan dedicating a tune to Appalachian fiddlers Art and Hiram Stamper) was the nearly a cappella "Hush" ("Somebody's Calling My Name"). The vocals were awesome, and these guys could save money on strings and luthiery, hang up their instruments, and give the Fairfield Four a run for their money any day.

Mike Compton's lead tenor was spiritual, bluesy, and riveting; Stuart Duncan's second tenor/baritone added a strong and mellow counterpoint; Pat Enright's high tenor was right where you wanted it, kind of pulling up at the edges of this dark and cloudy song, and Alan O'Bryant supported the whole structure with that strong bass voice that he seems to pull up from the floor beneath him when the need is there.

I'd like to say something wonderful about Dennis Couch's vocals, but he blended in so well with the rest that I couldn't pick him out. (Ellen, my wife, was so drawn into "Hush" that she almost forgot to breathe.")

A too-small segment of "Hush" is among the sample cuts you find on various Web sites where you can buy the CD (engineered by the fast-fingered Tuesday night tenor guitarist, Tim Roberts and mixed by Tim and Alan). I was going to buy the CD before they did "Hush," but after hearing that song I couldn't wait to get my copy.

Having said all of that about this one powerful and different song, the rest of the performance—and the versions on the Grammy-nominated CD—made me once again grateful to the people who helped guide me back toward this music.

A special thanks goes to Kirk for hosting the Tuesday jams, to all of you who play, and for the serendipity that has Alan as a neighbor of Kirk's and jamming with a group of old-timers that (to my delight and surprise) includes me.

It's kind of an interesting mix, reconciling the great joy that my wife Ellen and I got from this fantastic performance with the fact that Alan is one of the guys on Tuesday nights. A special guy, no doubt, but ...well, I'm grateful for the opportunities to listen to and try to learn this music.

It's like a kid at Christmas. Picking up my fiddle or mandolin is like digging through a stocking of private little gifts. Sitting down to jam with you folks is like walking into the living room and getting that first sleepy-eyed glimpse of Christmas morning: There's so much wonderful stuff there that your senses just can't take it all in.

Oh yes, they gave away a free country ham too. ~Ed Gregory

Ralph Blizard Passes Away

Old-time legendary long-bow fiddler, Ralph Blizard, from Blountville, Tennessee, passed away Friday night, December 3, from heart failure, after having been in poor health for several months.

Ralph achieved many honors in his 85 years: He was inducted into the 2001 North American Fiddlers Hall of Fame, won the 2002 National Heritage Fellowship Award,

and won the 2003 Tennessee Governor's Awards in the Arts at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium.

Ralph founded TAMHA (Traditional Appalachian Musical Heritage Association) a few years ago to help preserve the old-time musical genre he loved so much.

I visited Ralph on numerous occasions at his picking parlor in downtown Bountville and followed him as he toured the music circuit. I have every song Ralph recorded, my favorite being his "Mississippi Sawyer." Ralph was a true Southern gentleman, and will be missed by all who knew him.

~Bob Cox

Blountville Musician Blizard Dies

BLOUNTVILLE, Ralph Blizard, a nationally known master long-bow fiddler who specialized in traditional Appalachian music, died Friday at his home here.

Blizard, 85, was a 2002 recipient of the National Heritage Fellowship awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts and was inducted into the North American Fiddlers Hall of Fame in 2001.

The fiddler was a co-founder of the Traditional Appalachian Music Heritage Association, an organization to preserve the musical heritage of the region. Blizard was also a recipient of the Tennessee Governor's Award for the Arts and had served as a member of the Tennessee Arts Commission for five years.

Blizard learned to play the violin, or fiddle, at an early age. During a 2003 interview with the Johnson City Press, he said he was playing the instrument by age 7. But learning to play the fiddle was not easy for Blizard, not because of a lack of talent, but because his father, Robert Blizard, did not want him to tear up his fiddle. So he taught himself to play using a mandolin and did much of his initial practicing in secret.

Blizard said the mandolin has the same noting as the fiddle, and he later added the bowing movement with the help of his mother, Jennie Blizard.

Learning how to play the fiddle did get easier. Once Blizard's father discovered that his son was seriously following in his foot-

steps, he became a supporter of his efforts. But his father wanted Blizard to learn to read music, something his son spent little time on. "Traditional old-time music is authentic, and to me, playing by note instead of by ear, was unnatural," Blizard said during a 2002 interview.

Blizard said his earliest influences were three local fiddlers—Charlie Bowman, John Dykes, and Dudley Vance. "They were my dad's age. They were the three best-known old-time fiddlers in the region. I played music with all of them as a kid," he said.

Blizard began playing music at local radio stations in the early 1930s, appearing on Bristol's WOPI in 1932 and playing with his band, the Southern Ramblers, from 1938 to 1940 on WJHL, Johnson City. The band moved over to WKPT, Kingsport, where Blizard played until joining the military in 1942. Following his time in service, he became part of WKPT's Saturday night show, "Saturday Night Hayride," but following marriage and the birth of two sons, Blizard put music on the back burner in the mid-1950s while he worked on a small farm and took a full-time job at Tennessee Eastman Company in Kingsport.

After retiring in 1980, Blizard took up the bow again, but said he had to relearn how to play. "I sort of scratched around. I practiced four, five, six, seven hours a day," he said. "I developed a fast method of relearning by using a stereo with headphones. I'd play the tape and copy it."

Following his re-education, Blizard also got together with a new band. He met up in 1982 with the Green Grass Cloggers, and together they formed the New Southern Ramblers.

In the mid-1990s, Blizard helped start a weekly jam session at the Anderson Townhouse in Blountville. "It's all acoustic music," Blizard said. "We have the traditional music, and we have the bluegrass. The idea is for young people to come and learn music."

From staff reports, Johnson City Press, December 5, 2004

Sent to the *Old-Time Times* by Bob Cox

The Tennessee Old-Time Music Camp: An Update

We have decided to postpone the opening of the Tennessee Old-Time Music Camp until 2006. This move will allow more time to plan and more time to spread the word and stir up interest.

~Dave Cannon

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 5th.

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*, currently 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

Book and CD Review: *Old-Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes* by Jeff Todd Titon

A couple of months ago, while attending Kirk Pickering’s Tuesday evening jam, I noticed this book on Kirk’s coffee table. After glancing through it, I went out and bought myself a copy.

It was published in the fall of 2001 by the University Press of Kentucky is available from Amazon.com for \$45.

The book has three major sections: the “Introduction,” “Fiddle Tunes with Annotations,” and “Capsule Biographies.” Inside the back cover is a CD with 26 tunes.

The “Introduction” discusses old-time fiddling and Kentucky fiddling in general. Three points make for good examples of its content. First, Mr. Titon suggests that it takes most of us about seven years of practice to learn to play the fiddle. I was much encouraged by that statement. I’ve been at it for almost four years now and am still struggling mightily. Second, Mr. Titon surveyed the surviving recordings of old-time Kentucky fiddle music and worked up a list the 32 most popular tunes. “Martha Campbell” tops the list while “Billy in the Lowground” and “Sally Goodin” tie for second. Interestingly, the only waltz on the list is “Over the Waves.” Finally, he observes that most old-time fiddle tunes are played at about 120 beats per minute, which supports the conclusion I will draw in my

long-promised article entitled “How Fast is Fast.”

The second section, “Fiddle Tunes with Annotations,” gives the notations (sheet music) for 170 tunes. Often, several versions of the same tune are noted. With each notation, he gives the fiddler it was taken from and the recording used for the notation. He then comments on the tune’s history and mentions other fiddlers who played it. We’ve all heard the claims that fiddle music cannot be written in notation. Mr. Titon agrees with that claim, but points out that those limitations apply to classical music as well. Give the same Mozart violin concerto to five different classical violinists, and you will hear five distinctly different versions of it—if they are any good.

The third section, “Capsule Biographies,” provides thumbnail sketches of the lives of 32 old-time fiddlers. It starts with Alfred Bailey and ends with Jim Woodard. In between, you will find Snake Chapman, Clyde Davenport, J.P. Fraley, Ed Haley, Art Stamper, Hiram Stamper, Buddy Thomas, and many, many others. With most of the fiddlers, he lists one or more of the major recordings that the fiddler made. (Looks like John Hatton is going to be hauling more of my money to the bank.)

The CD, with its 26 tunes, offers only four tunes from the top 32 list, probably because the others are already widely available. It has five tunes each by Clyde Davenport and Isham Monday, four tunes each by William Stepp and John Salyer, three tunes by Estill Bingham, two tunes by Hiram Stamper, and one tune each by Luther Strong, John Masters, and Alva Greene. Several of the tunes are so laden with extraneous noise that the notes are difficult to hear.

It’s a great book. I’m still trying to figure out how I lived so long without it.

~Phil Sparks

A Penny Learned

Many fiddlers like to alter their bridges so the arc is a bit flatter and the stings lie closer to the fingerboard. These changes may make the fiddle easier to play, but they carry a price. Lowering the strings reduces the pressure on

the top of the fiddle and, in turn, lowers the fiddle’s volume.

That lost volume might be regained by using heavier gauge strings like Black Diamond, Old Fiddler, or Super-Sensitive orchestra gauge (also called heavy gauge). Don’t confuse the Super-Sensitive heavy gauge strings with Super-Sensitive medium gauge strings, which are sold pretty much everywhere.

Lots of everyday music stores carry Black Diamond strings, at least Mary’s Music in Dickson does, but you would probably have to order Old Fiddler or the heavy gauge Super-Sensitive from Elderly Instruments (www.elderly.com). The Violin Shop does not have them. I called to check with Williams Fine Violins, but they were closed for the holidays.

~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:

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or

(615) 797-4356

or

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White Bluff, TN 37187

The *submission deadline* for February's newsletter is *Monday, January 24*.

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.