

Nashville Old-Time String Band Association: Notsba

July

News

2009

Post Office Box 160038 Nashville, Tennessee 37216

www.nashvilleoldtime.org

**Reminder:**

**Free Old-Time Music Workshops Planned For *Uncle Dave Macon Days***

We want to remind you of Notsba's free, old-time workshops and a jam session at *Uncle Dave Macon Days*, July 10 -12 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

On Saturday, July 11, Rebekah Weiler's hands-on beginning banjo workshop is designed for those with little or no experience in playing the instrument.

Rebekah and fiddler Anna Roberts-Gevalt will co-lead a presentation on how the two instruments work together in old-time music.

Thomas Maupin and Jay Bland will do a demonstration of traditional buck dancing steps. A relaxed old-time jam will be hosted by Ray Mathes in the afternoon.

Presented on Saturday, this year's Heritage Award Winners are Bill and Janice Birchfield of the *Roan Mountain Hilltoppers*. Thomas Maupin, buck dancer, will be presented the Trailblazer Award on Friday.

For more information on the festival visit [www.uncledavemacondays.com](http://www.uncledavemacondays.com) -Ray Mathes

**Christian Wig at Third Thursday Jam**

Those attending the Fort Negley jam on June 18th had a pleasant surprise when Christian Wig stopped in to play. Christian, a nationally recognized musician, writer and historian, was in town for the American Artisan Festival at Centennial Park and decided to seek out an old-time jam.

He has played in a variety of old-time bands, but is currently noted for his study and reenactments of early fiddling in Colonial America. You can log onto his web site to learn more about his CD's, magazine articles, and his book, "Annosannah," a novel about life on the frontier during the French and Indian War.

Getting to play with Christian and hear about his research projects was a real treat. We appreciate his being here and hope he will come again soon. -Jim Hornsby

**Notsba Business**

**WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER!**

We'd like to welcome one new member this month:

David Clarke

Glasgow, Missouri

Thanks for joining us David. We hope to see you at one of our jams or Breakin' Up Winter!

**THANKS TO OUR RENEWING MEMBERS!**

This month, we have a renewing member:

Carol Dick

Lewisburg, Tennessee

Thank you for your continued support. We're glad you're renewing your membership.

## **Notsba Board of Directors Meets**

The Notsba Board of Directors met June 15, 2009 at the Buchanan Log House conducting normal business and electing the following slate of officers for 2009-2010: Lilly Hsu, Secretary; Joe Lipman, Treasurer; Don Kent, Vice President; Mary Lou Durham, President.

Reports submitted by committee members included that by the Performance Workgroup on the season's activities and one by the committee developing a brochure for newcomers and interested folks.

The next scheduled meeting is September 21, 2009. All members are urged to attend. -MLD

## **The President's Corner**

This is my last President's Corner column, and I want to thank all of the folks who have helped me in the past year; I particularly want to acknowledge Mary Lou Durham who now assumes the Presidency for the upcoming year. Mary Lou has been instrumental in helping move Notsba forward not only in the year currently ending, but also since the beginning of Notsba. Thank you Mary Lou!

I also am stepping down as the co-editor of the newsletter, and again want to recognize the tireless work of Mary Lou who continues as the editor.

When I first was elected President of Notsba, the first thing I asked for was help from the Board and the members in the form of volunteering to help the organization hold the ground it had gained and to continue to grow. I'm more convinced now of the continuing need for this involvement and ask that everyone make some contribution, even if it can only be a small one.

We all belong to Notsba because we enjoy playing and listening to old-time music; that's the fun part of the organization. However, as is true in any endeavor, to enjoy the fun requires a certain amount of work, and this is where each of us has a responsibility to contribute.

I look forward to playing and working with you in the future. -RW

## **The Summer Saturdays 2009 at Carnton Mansion**

The performance series at historic Carnton Mansion in Franklin has completed its month of June with reports of much enjoyment and some good exposure of old-time music to a public interested in and aware of history and tradition.

Notsba's performance group, in many subgroups, is presenting tunes, and sometimes songs, in an ambient fashion to people who've come to tour the mansion. Sitting on the porch in the breezeway section at the north end, we play each Saturday, and will through August, from late morning to mid-afternoon.

Folks touring the historic site are free to wander about while waiting for the tours to begin, and most sit awhile with the music and on some levels return to the past listening to tunes that date back to the time in which the mansion was occupied and then became a center of some activity during the Civil War. The smiles, applause, attention, comments and questions from listeners indicate that the music adds much to their visits.

In June the gardens have been luxuriant with growth and the grounds look splendid. The weather, while hot, has been tempered for the musicians by the air that courses through the group creating a natural cooling; what an organic and wonderful design this breezeway is for providing this comfort!

For those performing, this is, among many other things, an opportunity to develop in intensity for ensemble playing. We are many different combinations of small groups focusing on each other's playing, playing tunes longer or at different speeds than is usual in jams, exploring material that might not be in the larger group's repertoire, singing, talking about the music and giving to an audience. To a person we've come away from the experience with some exhilaration for the process and what it gives back to us.

Notsba thanks Don Kent and the performance group workgroup, Jim Hornsby, Andy Shivas, Mary Lou Durham and Ron Whitlow sitting as President, for getting the performance schedule together.

Even more, we appreciate the many people in the performance group who are giving of their time and skills in this outreach, education and development project.

If you'd like to know more about this series, please email us through the newsletter or talk to any one of us at a jam.

-MLD

## Scheduled Jams:

**FIRST THURSDAY SLOW JAM – July 2nd**, 6:30-8:30 pm, Ft. Negley Visitors Center.

For June 4th's Slow Jam Jim Hornsby will lead his third of three cross-tune sessions.

He'll review the four basic finger patterns for playing GDGD cross-tunes he taught in May and June. Old Gray Cat, Hunting the Buffalo, Georgia Railroad, and Huldy in the Sinkhole are the tunes he used to illustrate the patterns. In addition, he will review a fifth pattern for minor, or "modal" cross-tunes with a tune called Sally Coming Through the Rye. Then, he will discuss and play some tunes that combine two or more of these finger patterns.

**Keep these tunes taught at previous recent slow jams in mind to request.**

D—West Fork Gals, Lady of the Lake, Over the Waterfall, Needle Case, New Five Cent Piece, Shoo! Fly, Martha Campbell, Year of Jubilo and Cherokee Shuffle

A—Booth Shot Lincoln, Hunting the Buffalo, Little Dutch Girl, Red Rocking Chair, June Apple

G—Nail That Catfish to a Tree, Seneca Square Dance (Waiting for the Federals), Shove that Pig's Foot a Little Further in the Fire, Garfield's March, Georgia Railroad, Old Yeller Dog, Cora Dye, Sweet Jenny

C —Tennessee Wagoner, The Darker the Night (& G), Texas Gales

Am—Cold Frosty Morning

**SECOND THURSDAY REGULAR JAM - July 9th**, 6:30-8:30 pm, Buchanan Log House, 2910 Elm Hill Pike.

Tunes are played from moderate to up-to-speed. All skill levels are welcome and everyone's encouraged to play along. A list of tunes frequently played by the group is available on our website and a copy will be at the jam. New tunes may be brought in.

**THIRD THURSDAY REGULAR JAM - July 16th**, 6:30-8:30 pm, Ft. Negley Visitors Center. This is a regular jam, so tunes are played up-to-speed. Play the chestnuts or bring in something new!

**FOURTH SUNDAY JAM - July 26th** - Will be hosted by Laura Blankinship at Mansker's Station above Rivergate Mall from 2 PM until 5 PM. The jam will be at the Visitor's Center that is part of this historic site where Laura works as a guide. Please plan to attend this first fourth Sunday jam at Mansker's, a new venue for one of our musical meetings.

The address:  
745 Caldwell Ln.  
Goodlettsville, TN 37072

Directions:

Mansker's Station is located close to Rivergate Mall on Caldwell Drive in Goodlettsville.

Take I - 65 north to Long Hollow Pike. Go east on Long Hollow Pike and turn right on Caldwell. The jam will be in the Visitor's Center building.

## The Newsletter

Please send any newsworthy information by the 20th of the month for inclusion in next month's edition. Mary Lou - [mldurham1@juno.com](mailto:mldurham1@juno.com).

**The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the *Nashville Old-Time String Band Association*.**

**Notsba** is a volunteer organization and as its seen voice, the *News* publishes material from members and others who wish to contribute to the body of knowledge about old-time music.

While we strive for accuracy, we do not label "official" any content found here. We appreciate the generosity of our contributors!

# Some Things I've Learned About How I Can Improve My Playing, Continued

~Ron Whitlow

This article concludes my gathering and organizing information I've been helped by in my exposure to the collective thinking of the many players I've been fortunate to have talk to me about this music and their own development in it.

In June, I covered two areas: *Being There* and *Listening*. This month, I'll conclude with *Learning*, *Practicing*, and *Mechanics*.

Again I'd like to thank the folks who gave me these suggestions and ideas. There were many, but I would particularly like to mention Kirk Pickering, Julie Mavity-Hudson, Gary Scheufler, Karl Kersey, Gretchen Priest-May, Mary Alice Bernal, and Jim Hornsby for their help.

## LEARNING

1) There are times when it is important to not play. There can be lots of reasons to not play at a given time; like needing to listen more intensely, not knowing the tune, or simply realizing that the tune as it is being played is complete, for example. It's not necessary to play every tune at every jam session. 2) Respecting the beginnings and endings of tunes gives them their due. Jams don't have to be races to see how many tunes get played. Taking time before starting a tune to make sure everyone is together and ready and letting the ending of a tune reach its full end before letting it go adds a level of respect it and to the group effort.

3) Learning to accept suggestions and helpful criticism can help us grow no matter what we're trying to learn. Not taking personally suggestions of alternative ways to approach tunes can be small life lessons to use across the board. Asking for help if something is unclear usually yields good results as is finding out why one's version of a tune clashes with the ensemble sound. Perhaps the melody line needs some slight adjustment or the chords we're playing are not quite correct. Ask. Discover. Learn.

4) It's good to learn the chords and their changes to tunes we want to play, even before trying to master the melody; the chord structure gives a reference point for the notes of the melody. It's also important to be able to play the proper rhythm behind a tune if needed. If you're not sure of the chords to a tune, there are many fine resources, including the wonderful book, the [Pegram Chord Chart](#) that Susie Coleman and Kirk Pickering have put together over the years. You can download it free at [www.pegamjam.com](http://www.pegamjam.com) or go to that Website and send Susie \$15 and she will ship you a bound copy.

5) It is good experience to spend some time in private or group lessons. These will give developed approaches to learning instruments and can shorten time spent on some of what we might or might not learn on our own by trial and error. There are instructors for almost every instrument in old-time music listed under the "teachers" tab on the Notsba Website. The Musical Heritage Center of Middle Tennessee located in Pegram also has teachers for almost every old-time instrument. They offer private lessons at reasonable prices and also offer group lessons in a number of instruments.

6) Beginning to play a different instrument will complement the one(s) we're already dedicated to. For example, although it's a longer-term plan, learning fiddle will improve mandolin playing; learning mandolin will improve guitar playing.

7) Learning the history of the music and its artists, understanding the history of a tune, the time and circumstances surrounding its creation, helps in understanding the emotion of the tune and helps put that emotional component into its performance. A personal example of this is the tune "Waltz of the Little Girls" which is really the French tune "La Valse Pour Les Petites Jeunes Filles." If you have daughters and /or granddaughters, you'll understand this tune without even thinking about it once you have the translation of the title.

8) Rather than expanding repertoire, focusing on improving the tone, timing, and note accuracy of the tunes we already know helps us to own them. Teachers I respect have told me, "Play a tune accurately ten times in a row with no errors and it's yours." I believe that to be true.

9) We can improve our skills by tapping into the many resources that exist. The internet is such an amazingly comprehensive resource that we'll continue to talk about web based resources ongoing.

## PRACTICING

1) Patience is a virtue! Adult learners have more intellectual than kinesthetic ability. Muscle memory is built up over time and repetition. Though it is easy to get the tune into my head, it can be confounding that my fingers won't play what I hear in my mind. (See the next two)

2) Practice, practice, practice; and learn to love it. There is an almost meditative joy that happens in the best practices. It's not about perfection; it's about enjoying the feeling of the fingers on the bow and the string and the many

other things that are happening in the focused moment.

3) Bob Townsend said, "Don't worry about speed." Sure enough, after getting everything tight at about 80 beats per minute and playing the tune a few times a week for about six months, the tune's dance tempo (100-130 bpm) comes like magic.

4) Find a way to safely keep the instrument immediately available. When faced with having to pull the case out, open it up, retrieve the instrument, tune it, get any reference materials you're using currently, and only then begin, it's sometimes easier not to practice for that fifteen minute block of time you may have. Protect your instrument, but if you can do that and have it readily available for those small chunks of time, you'll practice more.

5) Finding time for oneself is essential on every level. I've heard this called your Sacred Time. This is your time to do what you want and need to do to take care of yourself, your core being.

6) Keeping a practice log or diary places one squarely on a known path. Maintain a list of four sets of tunes:

Tunes you know and only need to work on to keep them fresh

Tunes you're in the process of learning or currently working on

Tunes you want to learn or are just starting to learn

Practice exercises

Each of us is best able to decide how to allocate our available time among these four groups, but it is important to do some form of practice exercises to help improve playing skills. I've been told and do believe that keeping a record of how much time and on what I'm practicing is very important and that it's good to preplan the practice and then dedicate the time to it minimizing interruptions and distractions.

## MECHANICS

1) Learning the basics of music theory gives us the basic structure upon which the rest of our knowledge and learning is building. Patterns emerge that help us move forward coherently. For example, the 1, 3, and 5 notes of a major scale form the major chord. Practice the arpeggios of each of the primary keys (the 1, 3, 5; the next 1, 3, 5 higher up the fingerboard and so on), to help your fingers find those notes but also to help your fingers find the melody notes (most of the melody notes in a tune fall on the arpeggios or 1, 3, and 5 of a key).

2) One of the most important elements of playing old-time music is a strong beat. In most kinds of music, one beat of the measure is emphasized with another beat having less emphasis. Most of the time, since we are in 2/4 or in 3/4 time, it is the first beat we emphasize. Emphasizing this beat slightly helps keep the rhythm steady. In other words, "1 & 2 &, 1 & 2 &" perhaps with a slight emphasis on beat 2, but less than on beat 1.

With that said, many old-time players emphasize the "backbeat" instead of the "on" beat, and that can be very effective. You know when players are doing this because the bystanders will get up and start dancing. In other words "1 & 2 &, 1 & 2 &" (with the strongest beat on the "and" of 1).

Tapping a foot is really a great way to help keep a steady beat. If you look around the room during a jam, you'll often see people patting their feet, sometimes not in rhythm to the tune. When tapping a foot, pat on the 1 and the 2, or on the off beats (the &'s) rather than trying to pat what you are playing. The object is to keep a steady beat.

Playing with a metronome is one of the most important things we can do to improve the steadiness of our rhythm. It's common to feel that the metronome is speeding up and slowing down, so don't feel discouraged when this happens. We've all been there. Trust me, it's not the metronome. I had someone tell me once that playing with the metronome really messed him up; well, that's a sign that he really needed to do it. An alternative to using a metronome that's more fun is to play with a CD. However, if you set the metronome in time with the CD, in many cases you will find that the playing on the CD is not steady, either (which makes me feel better).

To me, old-time music is all about rhythm, whether it is a square tune or a crooked one. After all, it is dance music, and for dancing you need a good strong beat.

While not complete by any means, this valuable information is helping guide me. I know improving my playing and sound quality is a life-long journey, but it's one I'm enjoying and plan to continue. I appreciate the help and guidance of my fellow musicians and look forward to learning more from you.

# Tune of the Month

## Little Dog Waltz

Ray Mathes

Franklin George played a lively waltz at the 2009 *Breakin' Up Winter* festival. He called it the "Little Dog Waltz." To me, the tune sounded like "How Much is that Doggie in the Window" made popular by Patti Page in 1953, so I started looking there for some background. Wikipedia tells us the song is a "novelty song" written by Bob Merrill in 1952 and adapted from a well-known Victorian music hall song. (But they don't give the name of the song!)

Franklin George said that Bruce Betler told him the tune was known as "Helvetia Waltz" in his home town of Helvetia, West Virginia.

"*Helvetia, West Virginia is a small Swiss village in a high mountain valley. The original Swiss and German settlers arrived in 1869...*" is how the web page starts. ([www.helvetiawv.com](http://www.helvetiawv.com))

I called the library in Helvetia to find out if anybody knew about the Helvetia Waltz. I was referred to Joe McInroy who is the leader ("sort of") of the Helvetia Start Band, a community band that plays for events and a monthly square dance. Joe said the Helvetia Waltz is actually a schoddish and is called the Helvetia Polka. When I asked him if it sounds like the Little Dog Waltz, he said no, that's more like "Bim Luterbach," and apologized that he couldn't figure out the spelling. But he referred me to Vernon Burky who had been around Helvetia a while.

Vernon is almost 84 years old, and has been playing music in Helvetia since he was 12. He still plays fiddle at the square dances. He said he used to fiddle with Bruce Betler. When I asked him about Bim Luterbach he replied "Bim Luterbach haune min stromph verlorn." Said he wasn't sure how to spell it either. His grandad and grandmother were from Switzerland and he learned the song from them. The translation is "Down by the Clear River I lost my sock, and without a sock I won't go home. So I'm going back to Luterbach (the Clear River) to buy a sock for my foot."

And that's as much as I could find out about the origins of "Little Dog Waltz." What about Bruce Betler? He's now a monk living in Germany.

By the way, the good folks in Helvetia asked me to get the word out about the Helvetia Community Fair, September 12 & 13. It is one of the oldest agricultural fairs in West Virginia and one of the most traditional. Since 1914 it has brought the community together to celebrate the harvest and the Swiss heritage. (<http://www.helvetiawv.com/Events/Fair/Fair.htm>)

## Little Dog Waltz

- A) GGDD GCGG (2X)
- B) GCGG GGDD (1X)
- C) GCGG GDGG (1X)

Old-Time  
As played by Franklin George  
At 2009 Breaking Up Winter  
Nt: Ray Mathes

### Guitar Chords

### Mandolin Chords