

A Publication
of Your
Nashville
Old-Time
String Band
Association

UPCOMING
ASSOCIATION
EVENTS



Thursday
November 4
Slow Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Stratford High
Cafeteria



Thursday
November 11
Regular Jam
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Stratford High
Cafeteria



November 24
4th-Sunday Jam
2 to 5 PM
Hosted by
Julie Mavity-Hudson
and
Eddie Hudson

Old-Time Times

NOVEMBER 2004

In This Issue

Events, pg 1 4th-Sunday Jams, pg 1 Directions to the 4th-Sunday Jam, pg 1
Old-Time Camp in Tennessee?, pg 1 The Annual Bell Witch Festival, pg 2
Old-Time Music--"SQUARE" Music? pg 2 Black Banjo: Then and Now, pg 3
Bob Carlin's Old-Time Banjo Workshop, pg 4 A Report from Athens, pg 4
An Interesting Web Site, pg 5 CD Review, pg 5 The World's Oldest Tune, pg 5
A Penny Learned, pg 5 **Newsletter Info**, pg 6

EVENTS

Kentucky

Art Stamper Day

Held November 20 at Morehead in the Kentucky Center for Traditional Music at Morehead State University. Areas will be set aside for jamming, and a stage will be provided for those who would like to tell stories about Art Stamper and play tunes they have learned from him. For additional information, E-mail Jesse Wells at je.wells@moreheadstate.edu

FOURTH-SUNDAY JAMS

Homes have been found for all of 2004's 4th-Sunday Jams, so it's time to schedule your home for a 4th-Sunday Jam in 2005. April and September have been taken, and we don't schedule 4th-Sunday jams in December.

E-mail Darlyne Kent at dkent@davidson-academy.com.

DIRECTIONS TO NOVEMBER'S 4th-SUNDAY JAM

From Nashville, go west on I-24 (toward Clarksville). Take the New Hope Road Exit (Exit 35). At the bottom of the ramp, turn left. Go through a 4-way stop with a flashing light (Clarksville Highway) and on to the next flashing light at a 2-way stop (Old Clarksville Highway).

Turn left onto Old Clarksville Highway, and go to the second road on the left, Park Lane. Julie and Eddie live in the third house on the left. The house is back in the woods, so look for the number 1015 on their mailbox.

If you lose your way, call Eddie on his cell phone, 415-6931.

OLD-TIME CAMP IN TENNESSEE?

There are banjo camps and old-time camps and fiddle camps springing up all over the country, but I know of none that have been held in the mid-South. Bob Townsend and I would like to start one this summer. At Bob's suggestion, we went to look at Beersheba Springs on Monteagle

Mountain. It seems to be the perfect spot for a camp of this type. It is an antebellum Methodist camp that has lately been remodeled. It is remote and quiet. The food is known throughout the Methodist world as something just short of amazing. There are classroom areas and large areas for jams. We can offer accommodations in four different price ranges, including camping. It is our intention to offer staff positions and a few scholarships. Bob and I have discussed the idea of having a more Tennessee-oriented festival with all the faculty members having some Tennessee connection.

To make this thing fly, we will have to pay for advertising and pay faculty members. We will have to put a small deposit on the camp and try to arrange a concert for the faculty so they can make a little more money. Bob and I are willing to do all of this if we have enough local interest to warrant it. I figure that to make this thing successful, we will need to have at least 150 students. Once we have a handle on how many of the Nashville crowd would be interested in attending, we can make a decision on whether Bob and I should spend the money to get this thing off the ground.

If you would be interested in participating, please contact me at 615-868-9842 or E-mail me at rcannon3@netscape.net I am not asking you to write a check now. I am just trying to get some idea of the interest level. If I don't get responses from this month's newsletter, I will assume that there is no interest in this sort of thing.

If you have never been completely submerged in the music, you really should try it. This would be for one weekend, and we will keep the cost down. Please contact me as soon as possible. We already have a few faculty members who are interested, and we would like to book them as soon as we can.

~Dave Cannon

In mid-August, the annual Bell Witch Festival and contest took place in Adams, Tennessee, just north of Springfield. It was held adjacent to the historic Old Schoolhouse/Museum site.

Due to several other contests and conflicting events taking place that same weekend, only a few NOTSBA members were able to attend. Notable among the participants, however, was Bill Jones, who won the Junior Fiddle category. Bill then took the overall fiddle championship in the Junior-Senior Fiddle-Off by defeating the Senior Fiddle winner Carl Franklin.

The single category for bands at Adams is open to bluegrass, old-time, and country genres, and it featured several accomplished bluegrass groups. Playing old-time fiddle tunes and Civil War-era songs, the band Old South (Marlin Rood, Joe Peaveyhouse, Joe Fentriss, and Jeff Rohrbough) won second place, proving as they say, that old-time music really IS better than it sounds!

We hope to see more of you there next year at this enjoyable event.

~Jeff Rohrbough

Old-Time Music—"SQUARE" Music? What is the oldest musical instrument?

What's "square" about old-time music? Shape note singing . . . where the singers sit in a "hollow" square, using the oldest musical instrument, the voice. This summer I took my first (but not last) class on shape note singing. Dr. Ron Pen, the leader, introduced us to a glorious sound at Swannanoa Gathering. Dr. Pen is a professor of American music and the director of the John Jacob Niles Center for American Music at the University of Kentucky.

In the 1700s, singing schools were established for people who were not formally trained to read music (like Don, for instance). These schools taught them to sing songs with which they were unfamiliar. An itinerant singing master would ride into town, hold a singing school for a few weeks, market and sell tune books, and then move on. While the interest waned in the Northeast, the Southern folk continued to enjoy shape note singing.

Singings were held in old churches with wooden floors and high ceilings, where many occur still today. They ring with sound! Some annual singing meetings and conventions are held at different churches throughout the year with several hours of singing followed by an old-fashioned dinner on the grounds. After dinner, there's more singing.

Sounds heavenly!

The singers are seated facing each other, and they sing in four parts: tenor (melody), bass, treble, and alto. This is one music form that is designed expressly for the enjoyment of the participant. It is not performance-type music. You don't have to have a pretty voice—volume seems to be the key.

In its most basic form, the notes take only four different shapes: fa (triangle), sol (circle), la (square), and mi (diamond). They are still sung in the familiar seven-tone scale. Songs can be in any key the leader chooses, The key is selected to fit the range of the singers' voices. All songs are sung through first by "singing the notes." Thus, a familiar song may be sung as *fa fa sol fa la sol mi la*, etc. By going through the song first by the notes, the singer becomes familiar with his/her part. Then the song is sung in four parts using the words.

The harmony is wonderful. *The Sacred Harp*, 1991 edition, is the most commonly used songbook, although there are a few others. You will hear Celtic and Shaker characteristics in some of the songs. The hymns (some familiar and others not) have wonderful passages. In earlier songbook editions, footnotes are included on why a song was called by a specific name or where it was written. Those old editions are extremely difficult to find.

A group in Nashville holds a singing on the first Sunday of each month from 3 to 5 in the afternoon. Don and I have enjoyed singing with the group, and we look forward to participating more. We've enjoyed singing with some other folks who are old-time musicians too. If you are interested in joining us or just interested in additional information on shape note singing, visit the Web site

www.fasola.org and click on Tennessee and Harpeth Valley Sacred Harp Singers.

Maybe we'll see you there one Sunday!

~Darlyne Kent

Black Banjo: Then and Now Gathering

April 7 through 10, 2005, at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, African-American banjo players, scholars, and lovers of the banjo will come together from all over the US and beyond. They will be attending the first Black Banjo: Then and Now Gathering.

The gathering will feature lectures, jams, workshops, down-home frolics, and performances—four days to meet, mix, and mingle. It is sponsored by Black Banjo: Then and Now (BBT&N) <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BlackBanjo/>, an on-line group founded in March 2004.

BBT&N's four-fold mission is (1) to create awareness that banjo playing today is an outgrowth of the African experience, (2) to bring attention to contemporary Black banjo players, (3) to celebrate the banjo's place in African-American music and culture, and (4) to highlight the banjo's role in cultural exchange.

Presentations at this historic event include Swedish ethnographer Ulf Jagfors on West African relatives of the banjo, instrument maker Pete Ross on how minstrel banjo playing has influenced folk styles, musician and educator Sule Greg Wilson on rhythm and banjo playing, and Dr. Cecelia Conway on African-American banjo players Elderly African-American musicians are expected to attend as are other well-known musicians, collectors, and teachers. In addition to the banjo, the fiddle, the guitar, old-time music, and the blues will find their places at this gathering.

Africans brought the funky, plunky banjo to the Americas. Only in the mid-19th century did the banjo become popular among European Americans. African-American banjo playing has continued to this day in traditional, classic, jazz, blues, and folk styles.

This gathering will play an important role in asserting the African-American presence in

the world of the banjo and the banjo's central place in Black musical culture. All are welcome.

For information about attending the Gathering, go to blackbanjogathering@hotmail.com.

Bob Carlin's Old-Time Banjo Workshop

On Saturday, October 16, Bob Carlin, the world's best-known old-time banjoist held a highly successful workshop at the home of Diane and Ron Ault.

At the workshop, Bob taught the basic and advanced techniques used in the claw-hammer banjo style. The participants included all skill levels, from those who had never played before to Rebekah Weiler.

To me, the most interesting instruction came as Bob went through the steps he follows when "working up a tune." First he works out the basic tune. Then he looks for ways to embellish it.

The embellishments may include hammer-ons, pull-offs, up and down slides, double-thumbing, and drop thumbing. With a little time and attention, any tune can be brought up to its fullest potential.

I also enjoyed Bob's musings about the days when he worked with John Hartford. I came away with a CD of Bob and John doing tunes on the banjo and fiddle. It is excellent and will be the topic of a future "CD Review" in this newsletter.

That evening, after the workshop, Bob held a concert and kept us entertained for over two hours.

Nashville's old-time community was indeed fortunate to experience Bob Carlin's artistry, and we are indebted to Ron and Diane for making the workshop possible.

~Phil Sparks

A Report from Athens

On Friday, October 2, Kitty and I drove to Athens, Alabama, dragging our new camping trailer behind us. We had been given directions to Betty and Spider Dowell's home,

just outside Athens. When we found them, Dave Cannon was already there, as were several members of Betty and Spider's family. Before long, we were joined by Leo McDermott (see the following article).

Friday evening, we made a quick trip to the University campus where the fiddlers' convention was being held. There we found loads of vendors selling food, crafts, and musical instruments. We listened to some mandolin picking and some old-time singing and then headed back to the trailer and our bed.

Saturday morning, we sat around with the gang, sipping coffee and picking. Around 10 AM, we returned to the campus to enjoy the fiddle and banjo contests and to do a little picking with our friends. Lots of familiar faces from Breaking up Winter were there.

We were impressed with the festival. It was well organized and the people who ran it (including Spider) were friendly and helpful. Kitty bought a pot, I bought a fiddle, and we both ate too much.

Saturday evening, we headed back to the Dowell's again, not out of boredom, but because we had been promised a grand jam session—and a grand jam session it was. Bob White, Don Kent, and Janine Chamorro played the fiddles, Dave Cannon and others picked the banjos, Darlyne Kent, Kathy White, and I kept rhythm on guitar, and Brooke Allen played the bass. No telling who all I have failed to mention. Anywho, it was the finest jam session I have ever attended.

Sunday morning, Janine, Kitty, Leo and I drank some more coffee and visited before we all headed for home.

It is a great festival, complimented by Betty and Spider's generous hospitality. See you there next year.

Who were the winners? Here are some of the names I recognized:

Jim Holland, old-time banjo, 3rd
 Dave Cannon, old-time banjo, 4th
 Leo McDermott, classic old-time
 fiddler, 3rd
 Bill Jones, junior fiddler, 4th
 Flying Jenny, old-time band, 1st
 The Blue Creek Ramblers, old-time

band, 5th

A guy named Joel Whittinghill won the junior fiddler contest and then took "Fiddle King," the overall fiddle championship. Joel is from Bowling Green, so we may meet him when we attend a jam with our friends in that fair city.
~Phil Sparks

**An Interesting Web Site,
Courtesy of Leo McDermott**

While Kitty and I were camping at the Dowells in Athens, we made friends with Leo McDermott, an accomplished fiddler many of you have known for years.

I asked Leo for help with "Needle Case." He did what he could with the limited time we had and then referred me to his Web site, www.fiddletunes.org.

His Web site did the trick. I found there an mp3 of "Needle Case" as well as the notes or sheet music for the tune. By now, I've added the tune to my miniature trophy case.

Leo's excellent Web site is an ever-expanding work in progress. You should give it a visit and revisit it from time to time. Oh yes, tell Leo I sent you.

~Phil Sparks

**CD Review: *Wake Up Darlin' Corey*
by Art Stamper**

Art Stamper has released a new CD, and it may well be his best work to date. He is joined by Harry Bickel on the old-time banjo and Doc Hamilton on the guitar. To top it all off, Tim O'Brien does some outstanding vocal work, proving that old-time music CAN be sung.

Art Stamper is Art Stamper. Need I say more?

Harry Bickel is first-rate banjoist and a longtime friend of mine, going back to the seventies when my brother and I spent many good times at Harry's "Bluegrass Hotel," a beautiful old Victorian home once occupied by an ever changing roster of struggling musicians.

It was there that I met Doc Hamilton, a kind, introspective man and an excellent fiddler in his own right.

Tim O'Brien is one of our most versatile artists. He plays several instruments, is famous for his perfect pitch voice, and has worked with bluegrass, Celtic, and old-time music, as well as others. Many of us know him through his work with the sound track of *Cold Mountain*.

In short, the great Art Stamper is in excellent company on this CD.

Wake Up Little Corey is not just a collection of old-time tunes and songs, it is a tribute to Art's father, Hiram Stamper. This time around, Art and his cohorts make a conscious attempt to capture the beauty of old-time music as it existed when Art was only a child.

This CD is even better than *Good-Bye Girls I'm Going to Boston*, and I believe that it's destined to become an old-time classic. You can order your copy by going to Art's Web site, www.artstamper.com.

~Phil Sparks

**What Is the World's Oldest
Old-Time Tune and Song?**

Do you have any nominations? If so, send your ideas to Phil Sparks, the editor.

A Penny Learned

Only two types of wood are so dense that they will not float in water. One is ebony, famous for use in many musical instruments. The other is pernambuco (PER nam **BOO** ko), the preferred wood for making violin bows.

~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.

NOTICE: Since I have been editing this newsletter, I have accidentally failed to publish three articles when I should have.

If you send me something and I do not publish it, something is wrong. I would NEVER consciously ignore your submission. When I mess up, PLEASE bring it to my attention so I can fix it. (Honestly, I'm a nice guy, but my filing system stinks.) ☺ Phil

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or

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or

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White Bluff, TN 37187

The *submission deadline* for December's newsletter is Wednesday, November 24.

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, we need the information desperately. Please let us know about it.

You can reach Phil at: