

ALL ABOARD THE BAKERSFIELD BLUEGRASS EXPRESS!

by Ted Kuster

If you're going to the Bakersfield Great 48 from anywhere in the northern half of California, the Amtrak San Joaquin is the way to get there. Share the ride with fellow Bluegrass and Old-time devotees picking and singing all the way down the scenic Central Valley.

Once in Bakersfield, the Marriott is a quick stroll across the parking lot from the Amtrak terminus. You'll arrive rested and jam-ready, not so worn out from the I-5 you can barely drag yourself into the lobby.

Our train is called the "714 San Joaquin" and it starts off at Jack London Square in Oakland at 11:36 a.m. on Thursday, Jan. 5. Its first stop is at Emeryville, 10 minutes later. It stops at Richmond at 11:55 and at Martinez at 12:25. Whichever station you book your ticket for, get on the rear-most coach, the one with the twanging noises coming out the windows, and let the good times roll. If you're driving



from the North Bay, you might want to board at Richmond or Martinez. If you're driving from the East Bay or San Francisco, the Emeryville station is for you. There's ample validated parking there. If you're taking BART to the train, go to Jack London Square. Martinez has lots of free street parking within a block or three of the station; just watch out for the street cleaning signs.

If you're coming from the Sacramento area or up in the Sierra, you'll probably want to get on at Stockton at 1:19 p.m. or Modesto at 1:54. You can also get on at Turlock, Merced, Madera, Fresno,

Hanford, Corcoran, or Wasco.

You have some options for the return trip. Trains leave Bakersfield at 12:12, 2:12, and 4:12 p.m., getting back to the Bay Area a little after 6, 8, and 10 p.m. respectively. It's a good idea to pay the extra \$10 when you book the return leg so you can change departure times if you have to.

Note that we aren't part of a group package; all we're doing is all getting our tickets for the same train on the same day. If you like the choo-choo but can't make the same ride the rest of the group is on, no problem – Amtrak will still be happy to have you.

When you book, don't forget to claim your 15 percent student, senior, or veteran discount. And kids 12 and under are half off. Pro tip: if you're coming with a group, you might be eligible for

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CHRISTMAS TIME'S A-COMIN'



by Pete Ludé, CBA Chair

Well, it's that wonderful time of year again – a chance to spend time with family and friends, play favorite songs around the fireplace and shop for just the right gift – that snazzy capo, or the fancy flatpick, but the handmade strap? – for your instrumental loved ones.

Festival season is long gone, and now we've shifted to indoor jams, like the South State 48 a few weeks ago in Carlsbad, and the now-famous CBA Great 48 Jam in Bakersfield coming up starting Jan. 5.

Oh, and don't forget to buy your tickets to see The Jerry Douglas Band in Bakersfield on Jan. 6 – check out the

info on the last page of this Bluegrass Breakdown.

While we're talking about "Christmas Time's a-Comin'," I recently learned that this favorite Bluegrass Christmas song is one of the earliest in the genre. The backstory about this song is well told in "The Music of Bill Monroe" by Neil Rosenberg (a CBA Honorary Lifetime Member) and Charles Wolfe. Written in 1951 by Benjamin Franklin "Tex" Logan Jr., the fiddle virtuoso – and maybe the only famous Bluegrass fiddler with a doctorate in electrical engineering – Tex performed the song for Monroe backstage at a show in late 1951, and he loved it.

It was recorded by Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys in October 1951 (with Monroe's producer Owen Bradley on the vibes), and released on Decca just a

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CBA Member Pre-Sale Tickets Available Now!

FATHER'S DAY 48TH ANNUAL
BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL
JUNE 15-18, 2023
NEVADA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS
GRASS VALLEY, CA
FATHERSDAYFESTIVAL.COM

BREAKING UP CHRISTMAS AT GREAT 48

by Sandy DeVera



Join us as we count in a new year of Bluegrass events with the **Great 48 Jam**, at the Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center, Jan. 5-8, 2023. The staff at our fabulous host venue tell us they love providing this venue for acoustic music.

Sing away your holiday stress and jam with old friends, meet new friends at the hosted jams and workshops, and learn about what's happening in California Bluegrass at the jamming suites hosted by our regional associations.

CBA and Guitar Masters of Bakersfield present dobro virtuoso Jerry Douglas with his band on Friday, Jan. 6 at Buck Owens' Crystal Palace. Make your ticket and dinner reservations online

at buckowens.com/tickets. The food is top quality, and the Crystal Palace itself is a museum celebrating country music and the famous Bakersfield sound.

Saturday, Jan. 7, hop into one of the instrument workshops and the evening open mic, or enjoy the showcase band performances at the Marriott. This year there will be hosted gospel jams, one on Saturday morning with a more secular vibe, and a more traditional gospel jam on Sunday morning.

Great 48 board members Jeff Russinsky and Sandy DeVera look forward to welcoming you. Until then, you can find Great 48 updates and details at californiabluegrass.org/great-48.



Photo by Robin Frenette

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the Share Fare discount, which can come out to as much as 75 percent off.

OK, now to the most important part of all this. If you're thinking of joining our rolling picking party, please make known the train songs you like the most by checking them on the list at bit.ly/cbatrainsongs.

We'll count them up on board the train and see how the favorites compare to previous years, for no reason at all except fun. See you on board!

For more information reach out to: great48train@californiabluegrass.net

CHRISTMAS TIME'S A-COMIN'

from page 1

month later, to great success. It's gone on to be recorded by everyone from Johnny Cash to the Oak Ridge Boys. You might give a toast to Tex Logan next time you play this ol' favorite.

Planning ahead for the new year, CBA is extremely excited about the line-up for the 2023 Father's Day Festival in Grass Valley. Tickets are now available to CBA members and will be open to the general public later in January. If you are a CBA member, be sure to take advantage of the deep discount rate before it's too late! (And if you are not yet a member, this would be an ideal time to join). Details at FathersDayFestival.com.

CBA continues to help with events and jams throughout the state, and we're launching new programs to spread the joy of Bluegrass to a wider community in 2023. Do you have an hour or two to help out once in a while? We're always looking for volunteers— from staffing a membership table at an event to helping with graphics and mailing, and lots more. It's a great group to spend time with! Contact our VP of volunteers, Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow, at volunteers@californiabluegrass.net to learn more.

And as always, you can drop me a line with your thoughts or questions at Chair@CaliforniaBluegrass.net.

CONGRATS TO 2022 FUNDRAISING RAFFLE WINNERS!

CBA's annual fundraising raffle closed with a bang during our Fall Campout. Winning tickets were drawn from the concert stage between the performances of this year's two youth bands, Young and Up to Late, and Broken Compass.



Mike Oitzman of Penn Valley with Deering Eagle II Banjo.

Thanks to our raffle coordinator Bruce Campbell, and to our wonderful sponsors, who contributed an irresistible array of raffle prizes this

year. The funds raised go to CBA's General Fund to support our many regional events, programs, and activities during the year.

Congratulations:

- **Mike Oitzman** (Deering Eagle II Banjo),
- **Erik Vano** (Fiddle from The Fiddle Mercantile),
- **Michael Temperi** (Ear Trumpet Labs Delphina Mic),
- **Tim Hudson** (Santa Cruz Tony Rice Signature Model guitar), and
- **Nicholas Liguori** (Savannah Lighting Joe Mandolin)



CBA ELECTS NEW OFFICERS, BOARD MEMBERS

Annual Meeting Underscores Commitment to Leadership and Diversity

by Bluegrass Breakdown

This year's CBA board was elected during the annual membership meeting Saturday, Oct. 15, at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds.

Election coordinator **Josh Micheals** announced the results of balloting, noting the strong voter turnout, well exceeding the required quorum.

Seven incumbent board members were re-elected to their positions, and two new board members added, replacing retiring members Patrick Campbell and Darby Brandli.

Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow joins the board after serving as a regular contributor to the Bluegrass Breakdown and Father's Day Festival volunteer.



Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow

"I love our music, because Bluegrass and Old-time is music to be shared," she said. "It's about community. The music brings me closer to other people."

Leigh-Suelflow started the L.A. Bluegrass History Project Facebook page to help preserve the area's Bluegrass heritage, and is active in the Long Beach Dog Park Bluegrass jam scene. During COVID she sewed masks – one of which found its way to the Sister Sadie exhibit at the Country Music Hall of Fame!



Andrea Zelones

Andrea Zelones joins the board as an advocate for CBA's mission throughout California, focusing on building bridges across communities to diversify and increase membership and participation in Bluegrass and Old-time music.

Zelones says she also looks to cross-promote events in the Blue-

grass and Old-time communities, and encourage youth participation at local jams and events for the continued growth of the music.

Zelones has volunteered for Summergrass, Huck Finn, Lighting in a Bottle, Bluegrass Day at the Fair, CMSA conventions, Classical Mandolin Camp, Red Barn events, and many more. Zelones started a mixed jam at her home in late 2017.

The board elected its officers at its first meeting the next day; **Theresa Gooding** continues in her role as president, and **Val Cornejo** as treasurer.

Four new vice-president positions were created to provide leadership for core CBA activities, with volunteers appointed to committee roles: **Debbie Wendt**, membership; **Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow**, volunteers; **Darby Brandli**, youth program; and **Ted Kuster**, regional activities.

Readers likely already know our incumbent board members:

Pete Ludé is starting his fourth year on the board, and was re-elected as Board Chair for the next year. He'll be focusing on keeping CBA on track across its many activities.

Robin Frenette continues as one of CBA's primary photographers and website team leader, expanding the CBA Photo Archive and helping to reignite live music in the post-pandemic world through the Global Connections program and supporting music in her own community of Southern California.

Dave Gooding continues as entertainment coordinator, bringing an appreciation for building new CBA initiatives, as well as a respect for the traditions of Bluegrass music.

Gooding expresses particular support for CBA youth programs, saying "the California Bluegrass Association has the finest youth programs in the country, you should be proud of that!"

Karen Celia Heil continues as Old-time coordinator, Summer Music Camp liaison, and member of the executive committee. Heil is an ambassador for Old-time music from the Bay Area to the summertime fiddler's-convention circuit in the Southern Appalachians, and in this role renews and refreshes CBA's connections to the living traditions of Bluegrass music's Old-time roots.

Ted Kuster takes on the role of regional activities vice president, and will also serve as co-chair of the diversity, equity, and inclusion committee, and member of the executive committee. "I believe that developing the love of Bluegrass and Old-time music, both listening and performance, among a broad spectrum of children and younger adults, is the central aim that all our activities should be measured against," Kuster said.

Steve Ladonga continues as board member, having served as part of the Father's Day Festival and Music Camp team. Ladonga is excited about the promise of picking in person with the Bluegrass and Old-time communities, and helping out with planning the upcoming Golden Old-Time Campout, the Fall Campout, the South State 48, and the Great 48, coming up in January.

Lani Way continues as chair of the fundraising and grant committee, and co-chair of the diversity, equity and inclusion committee. Way's recent accomplishments include significant logistical and promotion support for Father's Day Festival; the negotiation of a new sponsorship agreement with the International Bluegrass Association; and increased CBA's support and visibility with the Kids on Bluegrass program in Raleigh, N.C., which included five of our own talented young musicians.

CBA's leadership continues with the 2022-23 board's clear focus on broadening the Bluegrass community through innovative youth programs; great live concerts and jamming festivals; wider outreach, deepening our roots and spreading our branches in the growth of California Bluegrass for years to come.

GREAT TIMES AT SOUTH STATE 48 VOL. II

by Donna Hargis



Mark Shutts and Eric Pitman leads an open jam, Chuck Sharp on left. Photo by Robin Frenette.



Afternoon Jamming. Photo by Bob Calkins.



Matt Michienzie. Photo by Robin Frenette

On November 3-6, pickers and grinners flocked to Carlsbad to attend "South State 48, vol. II." The weather was clear and cool, perfect for picking outside. Many stayed at the venue, some stayed nearby, and some were close enough to make it a day trip.

The venue, Carlsbad-by-the-Sea Hotel, features a grassy central courtyard with a gazebo and shady eucalyptus trees. Some folks brought propane heaters, although it never got very cold. There was beer flowing thanks to Project Barley, and even a massage therapist on site. But the main attraction was the non-stop jamming.

Vol. II had a few new features, one being the "Open Jam Tent - Where All Are Welcome," inspired by feedback from last year from a few folks who felt shy about joining in on the jamming fun. The "Open Jam" tent was hosted by various organizations and volunteers throughout the weekend.

Ted Kuster and Jack Murphy hosted two of the jams. Kuster said, "It was a consistently awesome environment all the way through the weekend, and it boosted a lot of people's skills and confidence levels. I love all the jams but it's those open, all-levels jams that really make the event for me."

The tent was full of happy pickers starting on Friday and all-day Saturday. Jam leaders taught folks how to participate in a jam, which made many people feel welcome.

The live music in the Windmill Foodhall started on Friday evening with the Matt Michenzie Band, a talented crowd-pleaser.

Matt put together a tight band that played a mix of Bluegrass standards, originals, and a few familiar tunes that had the enthusiastic audience members singing along.



Solid Gold Stranger from Oakland followed, with a more traditional Bluegrass sound and beautiful harmonies. The band members also graciously led an open jam the next day, and Matt led a free workshop.

On Saturday night, Water Tower owned the stage. They had the crowd out of their chairs as Jesse Eades played the Star-Spangled Banner on his banjo, then the band ripped into "Cotton-Eyed Joe." Water Tower looked like a traditional Bluegrass band, all suited up around a single mic, but emcee Danny



Water Tower concert. Photo by Robin Frenette.



Photo by Robin Frenette

Hootenany Clark summed it up well when he introduced them by saying, “If Sid Vicious and Bill Monroe had a baby, it would be Water Tower.” It was a lively scene all evening with smiles, dancing, sing-alongs, and an all-star finale that included members of the Honey Buckets’ Forest and Devin, plus Danny Clark sawing on fiddle.

The Windmill Foodhall features a hip bar and cluster of awesome food vendors popular among locals, and provides an opportunity to reach new Bluegrass fans. Christie Nunan, a Carlsbad resident who frequents the Windmill Foodhall, was at the event last year and was so impressed that she made sure to come back for “vol. II”.

After being blown away by Water Tower’s performance, Nunan ventured to the hotel courtyard to be greeted by a cacophony of jamming – all ages, all levels, from the tiny one-on-ones, to the huge circles. She witnessed the beautiful community doing what it does best.

“I had no idea! This is amazing!” she said with wide eyes. The picking would go on all night long – everyone was having too much fun to sleep!

Many reported jamming until 3 or 4 in the morning, but The Honey Buckets still hold the “Most Likely To Be Jamming When The Sun Comes Up” title.

During the day people jammed in both courtyards and attended free workshops. Many attended the ticketed event “Songs and Stories with Herb Pedersen.”

Herb was charismatic and warm, as he spoke about some of his amazing experiences in the world of Bluegrass and songwriting. He took questions from the audience, and even treated guests to a few songs performed with Patrick Sauber. They played Herb’s arguably his most famous song, “Wait a Minute,” but also the more obscure “She Sang Hymns Out of Tune,” and the Bluegrass standard, “A Good Woman’s Love” to wrap up a beautiful afternoon.

Folks came from near and far to attend South State 48. There were local pickers who came out for just the day, folks from all over California, Oregon, Idaho, and even Kentucky! Folks who made the trek, great or small, seemed very happy that they did.

South State 48 was inspired and modeled after the wonderful “Great 48” in Bakersfield, but it has a distinct personality and feel all its own. If you are able to make it out for part or all of this event, you will see for yourself what makes this seaside hotel jamming event so unique and special.

It is another jewel in the crown of California Bluegrass! 🐻



Jamming in the gazebo. Photo by David Cupp.



Photo by Robin Frenette



Herb Pedersen at SS48. Photo by Bob Calkins.



Watch the foot for the ending! Photo by Robin Frenette.



Photo by Robin Frenette



OTTER OPRY BRINGS LIVE MUSIC TO MONTEREY

by The Bluegrass Breakdown

For the past five years, Larry Phegley has been leading Monterey's Otter Opry concert series, regularly bringing Bluegrass and Old-time music to the area. We sat down with Larry recently to learn more about how this came to be.

Bluegrass Breakdown: Let's start with the basics. How did these concerts get started?

Larry Phegley: Amy Warren and I started hosting live Bluegrass in Monterey in March 2017. We had a good friend, Paul Blum (a current member of the Otter Opry Bluegrass Band), who refused to leave Monterey for his Bluegrass fix. We wanted him to have the opportunity to hear the music I was getting to hear at festivals. We wanted to try and attract musicians to the local jams as well.

BGB: Producing a series of concerts like this seems like a big job. How did you figure out how to pull it off?

Larry: There was a CBA concert series in Morgan Hill called "Night at the Grange." Tim Edes, former CBA board chair, was the promoter. Tim was gracious enough to give me advice on running concerts. I find running shows very stressful. As the promoter, you are always the last to know how many attendees will show up. You really want to do a good job for both the band and the attendees. Our shows are nearly always held at the Monterey United Methodist Church. The church has been so gracious providing dinner before the show and handling the concession at intermission, and it provides a source of income for them. After a couple of shows it looked like we might try and continue, so we needed a name.

BGB: And how did you come up with "Otter Opry?" A very catchy title, by the way.

Larry: I tried a few candidate names on people. but there wasn't anything people liked. Then I remembered that Mark Varner, the former editor of the Bluegrass Breakdown, and his wife Allison had run a concert series in Santa Cruz for a few years called the Otter Opry. I tried that name and everyone loved it, so Mark gave me permission to take the name over.



John Reischman & The Jaybirds take the stage at Otter Opry.

BGB: Mark left quite a legacy, didn't he?

Larry: Yes. It was tragic when Mark unexpectedly passed away just over a year ago, in September 2021. And this was just a few years after he fulfilled a life dream of retiring to Belize. I think he'd be happy to know that the spirit of the Otter Opry is continuing with such success.

BGB: Where do you find such great bands to come out to Monterey to play?

Larry: The Otter Opry has primarily hosted California bands from the Bay Area. Every year I attend the Starvy Creek Bluegrass Festival, outside Springfield, Mo. My parents and mother's side of the family are buried about 45 minutes northwest of that festival. One year Junior Sisk was there. I went up the mercantile table. Mrs. Sisk was there and I told her the story of the Otter Opry. She told me to contact my favorite bands and tell them the same story I had told her. If they were in the area, they might appreciate the opportunity to add an extra show to their tour. We have been trying that. It hasn't panned out for us yet, but maybe word is getting out. This year has been a little different in that bands are starting to contact Otter Opry to play. I am honored that we are considered a venue bands are seeking out.

BGB: Any chance you'll be bringing out more major acts in 2023?

Larry: I don't want to reveal too much about the relationship between the promoter and the band but I would love to be in a position, with support of the CBA, to invite a big East Coast Bluegrass name to play the Otter Opry. We have a loyal audience here, and if we could coordinate

with other CBA events to perhaps have a mini-tour of several California cities.

BGB: You mentioned that you had some other hard-working folks helping out to make the Otter Opry such a success.

Larry: Absolutely! It wouldn't be possible without them. Gail Garabedian handles publicity and Eddie Broeder is our webmaster. Bob Mannix is in charge of sound, banner posting, and all-around handy person. Val Cornejo, CBA's treasurer, takes care of all the budgeting and finances. We even have the Otter Opry Bluegrass Band dedicated to help raise funds: with Bob Mannix on bass; Roger Kern on mandolin; Paul Blum on banjo, fiddle, and dobro; and me on guitar. If anybody wants to pitch in, we'd love to have your help! Just contact us at volunteers@californiabluegrass.net and say you're interested in the Otter Opry.

BGB: In closing, what else do you want our readers to know?

Larry: That's easy! I want them to know that they need to buy tickets for one of our upcoming shows. If you're from out of town, no problem! Monterey is a beautiful place for a quick getaway. We have some outstanding concerts coming up early next year, that you won't want to miss. So plan your travels around one of these: Jan. 20, **Slocan Ramblers** (from Toronto); Feb. 18, **Kathy Kallick Band**; March 23, **Laurie Lewis and the Right Hands**.

More info & tickets at otteropry.org



Larry Phegley

REMEMBERING PETE HICKS

1952 - 2022

by Dave Berry

California's beloved mandolin player and fiddler Pete Hicks is gone, but "when you're dead and gone, life goes on" as he sings, in perhaps his final message, from a haunting video posted by his wife Lora on his Facebook account.

Pete was a jack-of-all-trades – musician, luthier, English-as-a-second-language teacher, and veteran. He shared his passions freely, as anyone could see at the slow jams he hosted at the CBA Father's Day Festival. His instructions to new jammers in a recent issue of the Breakdown give a lot of insight into who he was: watch the leader, keep it simple, play loudly, observe the pros, and play with everyone you can.

The news of his sudden passing spread quickly as bandmates, pickin' pals, co-workers, and long-lost friends shared Pete stories and grieved together on his social feed. As CBA Chairman Pete Ludé put it, "Many of us didn't realize how many hundred other people were so influenced by him until he unexpectedly passed away."

Pete Hicks' friend and bandmate Dave Gooding aptly described his life as being like an onion: on the surface, he seemed like your typical musician and



Photo by Snap Jackson

enthusiast, but when you peel back the layers you discover so much more.

He spent his formative years in Europe owing to his father being in the military service, and discovered Bluegrass there on Armed Forces Radio. Stateside, Pete drove a taxi and attended New York University, learned to play Bluegrass, and attended many legendary East

Coast festivals. In the Army, he taught at the U.S. Army Education Center in Thailand, where he took up fiddle with a band he put together of fellow teachers and service members.

Later Pete landed in Central California, where he received a master's degree in ESL from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and spent time in Hawaii playing Bluegrass and Hawaiian music. He taught English at the Salinas Adult School and became very active in the California Bluegrass scene in the Santa Cruz Bluegrass Society and playing in bands including the Central Valley Boys, Bean Creek, the Courthouse Ramblers, and the California Rodeo Band.

Pete became a fixture at festivals and venues such as Phil's Fish Market and Sam's Barbecue, and won numerous awards, including the Living Legend Award from the group "History of Country Music of Monterey County."

He and Lora put together the Hickstival Festival at Bolado Park in Tres Pinos where a memorial for Pete is planned on Memorial Day Weekend in 2023.

Pete's friend and bandmate Billy Pitrone, who played at his bedside in his final days, perhaps captured it best:



Pete Hicks (left) and Billy Pitrone (center). Photo by Robin Frenette.

"Our friend and bandmate of 21 years, Pete Hicks, has passed from life and we are bereft. Seventy years are not enough. He lived for the good times, and on his own terms. He was cultured and educated, scruffy, and high. When things weren't fun anymore, he changed the scene. He played music until it hurt, then he stopped. He indulged his pleasures until it hurt and he stopped. He lived a minstrel life, on the road for many years, until it hurt. So now he's stopped, and we are waiting to hear that low loud chuckle laugh that was a beacon, and a way to locate Pete, at any festival. Pete lived. He was just a man, but one whose like won't be seen anytime soon."

-Billy Pitrone (Bean Creek)



Monthly Trivia Quiz

by Bert Daniel

We had several insightful CBA folks who had correct answers to our October Trivia contest, including: Bill Amatneek, Bill Barnhart, John Drake, John Erwin, Jack Frost, Jim Lappin, Carl Pagter, Bob Palasek, Stuart Sims and Cary Taylor. They correctly answered the question "What Bluegrass Boy used a pseudonym?"

We were thinking of Howard Watts, who recorded as "Cedric Rainwater." Although many Bluegrass Boys (like Stringbean Akeman and Brad Keith) used nicknames, Howard was one of the earliest Bluegrass Boys, and this pseudonym is unique. Since there was more than one correct answer, we held a random drawing to determine the winner of the October prize—a deluxe Shubb capo. The lucky winner is Bob Palasek.



Howard Watts, aka "Cedric Rainwater"

November Trivia Challenge

What Rock and Roll band recorded a CD with the same title as one of Kenny Baker's recordings and plays Ginseng Sullivan at concerts as often as you might hear it at a Bluegrass festival?

Send your answers to trivia@CaliforniaBluegrass.net no later than December 30.

This month's prize is a snazzy Paige Capo. If there is more than one correct response, the prize winner will be selected by random drawing.

The winner will be announced in the February 2023 Bluegrass Breakdown.



Give the gift of music through a membership to CBA!

Visit CaliforniaBluegrass.org or call (844) BLU-GRASS (844-258-4727)

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