BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

Preserving and growing Bluegrass, Old-Time, Gospel, and traditional music in California since 1974.

FEB 2023

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: RECOGNIZING THE ROOTS OF BLUEGRASS

by Pete Ludé, CBA Chair

Our CBA community shares a common love and appreciation for Bluegrass and Old-Time music, and it's sometimes helpful to reflect on how this unique and exciting sound originated. We're all familiar with the stories about Bill Monroe's innovative Blue Grass Boys, featuring the unique banjo stylings of Earl Scruggs. But where did Bill and Earl get their inspiration?

Part of the answer is the long and rich tradition of music from the African-American community that was highly influential in early 20th century popular music.

February is Black History Month, so we thought it appropriate to feature some of our music's history in this edition of the Bluegrass Breakdown. Starting nearly 100 years ago, one week each February was set aside to raise awareness of African-American contributions to our nation.

The dates were selected to recognize the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas. Then, in 1976, President Gerald R. Ford formally designated February as Black History Month, urging Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

It is in that spirit that the California Bluegrass Association is proud to bring some of this history and perspective about how our beloved music, and even the banjo, are a part of Black heritage.

You'll find Lee Zimmerman's report on efforts to bring diversity back into Bluegrass, and updates on important work being done by the Black Banjo Reclamation Project, and the new Black Opry. There's also a report on the recently launched Black Banjo and Fiddle Fellowship program by the Oakland Conservatory of Music.

We hope these articles provide a useful perspective on how Bluegrass is truly a unique American melting pot, drawn from many musical influences, and could perhaps be used to build bridges and create a truly diverse community around our shared appreciation of these musical roots. Your feedback is always appreciated.

On a more somber note, as we went to press, we learned sad news of Carl Pagter's passing. As the co-founder of the CBA, Carl is a pivotal part of our history. He has influenced thousands of people with his infectious enthusiasm, persistence, and encyclopedic knowledge of the music. He will be deeply missed. We'll be featuring more on Carl Pagter's legacy in next month's Breakdown.

CATCHING UP WITH THE BLACK BANJO RECLAMATION PROJECT

by Hannah Mayree and The Bluegrass Breakdown

We invited the Black Banjo Reclamation Project's Hannah Mayree to collaborate on a piece for this month's Breakdown. We're excited about what this collaboration revealed about perspectives and values shared both on and off these pages, and we hope you'll see more about Hannah and the BBRP in the months and years to come.

Participants in this conversation are Hannah (HM) and Jason Dilg, the Breakdown's managing editor (BB). - Eds.

BB: Hi Hannah, and thanks for taking some time to meet with us today. We're inspired by the work you're doing, and are looking forward to sharing more about you with our readers.

HM: Hello Bluegrass lovers and players! It is an honor to introduce myself to this CBA community. I'm Hannah Mayree, a banjo player and musical artist, as well as the founder, director, and co-organizer of the Black Banjo Reclamation Project. The Black Banjo Reclamation Project is a creative ecosystem curating opportunities for Black, Afro-diasporic communities around the world to work with the banjo as a tool for reclaiming ancestral wisdom and promoting our human and cultural development.

Adrianna, from the Chicago build. Photo by Sulyiman Stokes.

BB: How does BBRP play a role in helping uncover the role of the banjo in American music, and the instrument's connections to the more universal human experiences you just mentioned?

HM: There are many Black people that have been deeply and negatively affected by the ways that the banjo has been adapted and used by communities outside of where the instrument comes from. For everyone reading, this is an invitation into understanding and healing.

The important aspect of BBRP and how we navigate the concept of American music is by focusing on Black people. There is no other organization that unapologetically focuses on the people and communities that are connected to the banjo by ancestral lineage and culture.

Organizations that simply focus on music

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REMEMBERING CARL PAGTER

February 13, 1934 – January 3, 2023

"Of course the CBA has seen its share of difficulties and crisis, but it is our volunteers who have built CBA into the largest and most innovative Bluegrass organizations in the US."

- Carl Pagter, CBA Co-Founder

Help us celebrate the life of CBA Member #1 in our March issue. Please send stories, photos, or other memorials to breakdown@californiabluegrass.net.

BRINGING DIVERSITY *BACK* TO BLUEGRASS

ARTISTS SPEAK OUT ON THE NEED TO RETAIN THE RELEVANCE OF ITS ROOTS

by Lee Zimmerman

Stylistic diversity is much easier than cultural diversity to achieve, because the latter too often requires a slow but steady stride.

That said, it's ironic that it's taken a long time for Bluegrass music to acknowledge its multi-cultural roots. Whereas Jazz, Blues, other forms of Folk, and Rock 'n' Roll readily credit their origins to African-American traditions, Bluegrass music often seems to have negated its roots, skipping over entire generations of musicians who fostered the form and paved the way for its evolution within the exclusive domain of white musicians.

Of course there's no denying the seminal efforts of folks like Bill Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, the Stanley Brothers, Jim & Jesse, The Osborne Brothers, The Clinch Mountain Boys, and Jimmy Martin in establishing the form as we know it today. However, it's equally important to part the curtains and, at least, look back further to the role played by Black slaves who recreated an instrument from West Africa that would become known here as the banjo. Their descendants later traveled throughout the South as part of the very minstrel shows that would lampoon them, planting seeds for the popularity of the string bands in the early twentieth century – a popular sound that became the original precursor of the Bluegrass bands that gained their first foothold in Appalachia in the 1940s.

Dom Flemons. Photo by Nate Kinard.

Songs of Our Native Daughters (L-R): Allison Russell, Amythyst Kiah, Rhiannon Giddens, Leyla McCalla. Photo by Terri Fensel.

It's taken a long time for people in the Bluegrass community to fully embrace those roots, but thanks to the emergence of bands like the Carolina Chocolate Drops and the musicians who emerged from its ranks — specifically Dom Flemons, Rhiannon Giddens, and Leyla McCalla — the color barrier is now being broken as Bluegrass begins embracing diversity with a wider recognition of the role Black musicians not only played in the past, but also in its present and future.

In that regard, there are some established performers acknowledging that empowerment. Tim O'Brien said: "Bluegrass music has traveled a long way from its southeastern mountain roots, with people of every color and stripe from nearly every part of this world playing and listening to the same familiar sound Bill Monroe and his colleagues brought forward back in the 1940s. Just like the rest of the world, the Bluegrass community needs more women, more people of color, etc, to participate and express themselves through the music. IBMA has helped some, and groups like Carolina Chocolate Drops and Della Mae are helping broaden things. They show that regardless of lifestyle, income bracket, skin color, or sexual orientation, we can all enjoy the beautiful and exciting sound."

Of course, he's not the only one to welcome the progress being made, and at the same time, the journey that remains. "I think diversifying Bluegrass requires a desegregation of musics of that era," Brian Farrow, a member of the multiracial band Gangstagrass insists. "Bebop and Bluegrass came about around the same time and both musics contain very similar elements, but they were championed by different communities. This is just a theory, but how do we get more Bluegrass musicians to head to the Jazz jams and more Jazz musicians to head to Bluegrass jams?"

Dom Flemons concurs. "When one studies the early roots of Bluegrass music, as well any Southern music, African-American music is firmly embedded within its powerful cultural tapestry. If there is a call to action, it is the need for more

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"Embracing traditional music cuts through the complexities of cultural memory, allowing each of us to be involved in the journey of discovery." - Dom Flemons

BRINGING DIVERSITY *BACK* TO BLUEGRASS

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Ganstagrass.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe, 1938.

Fantastic Negrito. Photo by Ariel Nava.

musicians to study, understand, and perform the traditional music of the United States. Embracing traditional music cuts through the complexities of cultural memory, allowing each of us to be involved in the journey of discovery."

Jeff Hanna of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band says he's excited about the prospect of making the music more inclusive. "It's so diverse," he suggests. "I love that about it. I remember when we played a festival with The Carolina Chocolate Drops. I just love them — Rihanna Giddens and Don Fleming. I'm a big fan of his. I love that connection so much, and I love that Bluegrass bands are starting to look like America. It's not just a bunch of white guys anymore."

In that regard, any number of musicians are not only taking the music further, but also seeking to actually embody its origins. One such artist is Xavier Amin Dphrepaulezz, a genre-bending roots musician who goes by the name Fantastic Negrito. Over the course of his career, he's not only managed to diversify his seminal sound through his choice of material, but also to urge respect for the roots.

"Listen to Sister Rosetta Thorpe," he suggests. "Get some Ray Charles and Robert Johnson in your life. Let the gods of Africa and the ghosts of Mississippi guide you. There is a spiritual component to music that transcends everything. I think if we in the creative community stay true and focused on this idea, we are unstoppable. There is a wealth of artists from our cultural heritage that have created and contributed so much music to the world. They have planted a garden so massive and plentiful. If we honor, nurture, and respect that garden, it is our greatest asset and wealth. The possibilities are endless and limitless. There is a legacy, a ripe, wealthy garden that was planted long ago. If we honor that, there will be plenty of diversity."

The Ebony Hillbillies have accepted that notion for themselves. Their latest album, "Five Miles From Town," reflects this theory through a sound that's soulful and socially conscious, plied by fiddles, banjos, riveting rhythms, and harmonies that share both drive and determination. It's front-porch music for urban environs made by African-American musicians, and yet it's all-inclusive as well.

At the same time, the group connects the history of string bands through educational outreach, specifically via the EH Kids Program presented by The EH Music Foundation, which the band has spearheaded throughout the U.S. and even as far east as Bulgaria.

"Maybe just relax and be more open to the new music that people are creating," they say. "Try to hear the relationship to the old stuff and you will see that the rewards will be great!"

Like the Ebony Hillbillies, Gangstagrass brings that idea full circle, and in the process they've challenged the notion of what constitutes true inclusion and authenticity. They combine strum and plucks of fiddle and banjo in a traditional Bluegrass setting with the revelry of rap music, in what to some might seem an incongruous setting. So while some might seem shocked by the synergy, crit-

The Ebony Hillbillies. Photo by Bill Steber and Pat Casey.

Arnold Shultz was a Black fiddler and guitarist who lived in rural Kentucky from 1886-1931 and was never recorded. Dom Flemon's & Shultz's Dream explores the music that Arnold's band would have played around the time he knew Bill Monroe. Photos: Arnold Shultz and his band (left); Dom Flemons & Shultz's Dream (right) by Vania Kinard.

ics have hailed its bold and adventurous approach.

As a result, the band exemplifies the possibilities that can emerge while moving the music forward. "After recognizing the mixed roots of roots music, which means it is neither white nor Black music, you know that what is standing in the way is not the music but the spaces and organizations that the music is set in," Rench, the band's mastermind, says.

"Bring nonwhite musicians, bookers, agents, managers, into the center of the decision making process. Spaces and organizations shouldn't feel like they're white spaces allowing in 'others.' That's difficult when it's been so branded as 'white.' But musicians have always been, at heart, collaborators and miscegenators. Put that at the heart of what you are organizing. Trust us, there is no shortage of amazingly talented nonwhite folks making Bluegrass-related music. It will piss off traditionalists, but it'll allow people that want growth and innovation to feel like Bluegrass is relevant. Focus less on capturing and maintaining the old sounds, and see Bluegrass as a living evolving thing that can incorporate and reflect new times and new generations."

"There's more than just a music and cultural divide here; there's a political one," Ganstagrass's Farrow insists. "But as the cultural narrative in our arts shifts towards equitability and holistically-minded communities, the isolation that Bluegrass has lived on is less profitable. There's a desperation for diversity to stay relevant, and I think reaching out in desperation is probably the wrong way to go about it."

R-SON the Voice of Reason, the band's other MC, has his own thoughts on the matter, and some thoughts on how to bridge the divide. "Rediversifying Bluegrass requires several steps," he suggests. "First, a recognition that doing such a thing is a good idea. That historically, many of its roots come from diverse space. And then share that history, so that current and future generations are aware of their cultures' impact on Bluegrass' creation. Second, make sure that any forces that are intentionally keeping it from happening are no longer allowed to do so. Some people are okay with the idea of separate spaces and will be okay with them remaining that way. But by expanding the idea of 'Americana' and 'Folk' musics, it becomes easier to include any musical forms into those spaces and allow any musicians into them to create."

"There is a spiritual component to music that transcends everything. I think if we in the creative community stay true and focused on this idea, we are unstoppable."

- Fantastic Negrito

Joe (R) and Odell (L) Thompson's music inspired The Carolina Chocolate Drops. Photo by Nancy Kalow.

BLACK OPRY

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR BLACK COUNTRY MUSIC

By Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Editor

Black Opry's Holly G.

Founder Holly G.'s Black Opry journey started with a blog. She wanted to shine some light on the unique challenges that Black Country music fans prepare themselves for, to do simply what a lot of white fans probably take for granted: going to a concert featuring a Country act.

Holly's inspiration for the blog came from another Black woman who shared her experiences in an online video about being a Country music fan. In it, she talked about her experiences going to Country shows alone versus heading out with white friends. With friends, she was free to enjoy the music. Alone, she was always watching her back – and both sides.

"She was telling my story," Holly said.

In the blog, started in 2020, Holly wanted to connect Black music fans around conversations like these, already going on among other Black Country artists in social media.

"One conversation happening on Twitter was with Rissi Palmer and Roberta Lea, who was saying she wanted to go to Nashville, but was afraid 'they are going to look at me like I'm crazy' – she was skeptical about how the crowds would respond to her. Today, look at her. She's so powerful with that guitar in her hand, and playing with her own band," Holly said.

Discovering other Black fans and artists was a thrill for both Holly and the community she was helping bring together. Seemingly a natural at finding ways to build creative community, Holly looks for how to build connections in an "underground network," as she calls it, and then finds who can benefit most from it.

"First I had to learn how the industry works, and then start doing it better. I could see that it wasn't serving the artists well. And a lot of artists just starting out just don't know any better."

So, an artists directory, and then booking shows with the artists looking for safe venues and appreciative audiences as the "Black Opry Revue," came next.

"I did a lot of research on the name." Holly recently shared with Bluegrass Breakdown. "The word 'opry' is public, so you can't trademark it, and it simply refers to a group of people coming together to play roots music. And then putting the word "Black" on the marquee makes it clear to everyone – artists, venue, and the audience – what's going on."

And audiences have responded. To date, Black Opry has booked more than 80 shows in 65 cities. And you won't only see Black folks at a Black Opry show. "We've found a whole crowd that's not being marketed to. We also see people from the queer and LGBTQ communities, other people of color, and white folks, because they know we are holding a safe space for them to enjoy Country music together."

Black Opry Revue also supports artist development by featuring several artists and using a concert format that fans of singer-songwriters may find familiar: the writer's round.

"The writer's round gives emerging artists a chance to gain valuable experience telling stories and singing songs in front of an audience, without needing to have a whole set of material worked up or getting left on stage by themselves. It all works together to allow these artists to develop in a safe space," Holly said.

"It's how people listen in Nashville, but the people on stage tend to all be straight, white people, singing five different songs that sound more or less the same, and they are all about a truck," she added.

But at every Black Opry show, someone comes up to Holly and says they were surprised by what they saw and heard: "One guy came up to me after a show and told me he came because "opry" sounded cool and it had the word "Black" in it. He told

Black Opry Revue. Photo by Jose Guererro.

Black Opry Revue. Photo by Emily Carver.

me he didn't know he liked Country music before he came to our show."

"It's really a kind of reclamation," Holly said. "Many of the white musicians we know of as the pioneers of Country were actually taught by the Black musicians that worked for them. DeFord Bailey was there at the beginning of the Grand Ol' Opry. Black people have been playing this music since it began."

When asked where she sees Black Opry in 10 years, Holly has a simple response: "I don't know – I didn't seek this out – but I imagine we'll still be working to discover, support, and enjoy the Black artists making music in the space."

In the shorter term, Black Opry will be adding a production residency Skidmore College's radio station, WSPN. The one-week residency will connect Black Country artists with mentorship and development opportunities. "The artists will leave having produced a professional electronic press kit, and the residency will cover their expenses and pay them for their time," Holly said.

The Black Opry Revue comes to Berkely's Freight & Salvage on Feb. 17, featuring Lady Deeds, Destinee Lynn, Autumn Nicolas, and Serafia. Doors will open at 7 p.m., show starts at 8 p.m.

Our Black Country Roots: Then and Now

DeFord Bailey

Smith County, Tenn.

- Harmonica, Guitar, Banjo
- Active: mid 1920s-1941

First musician to play on WSM's Grand Ole Opry and first artist to make records in Nashville.

Check out "Panhandle Blues" and "Fox Chase"

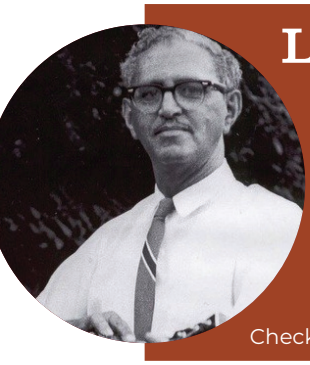
Jake Blount

Providence, R.I.

- Fiddle, Banjo, Guitar
- Active since 2017

2020 Steve Martin Banjo Prize recipient, IBMA Leadership Bluegrass Class of 2020.

Check out Tui's "Sugarbabe" and Blount's Afrofuturist "The Downward Road"



Lesley Riddle

Yancey County, N.C.

- Picked and Slide Guitar
- Active: mid 1927-1945

Collected "Hello Stranger," "Bear Creek Blues," and many other songs for the Carter Family. Influenced Maybelle Carter's guitar style.

Check out "John Henry" and "Red River Blues"

Rissi Palmer

Sewickley, Penn.

- Guitar
- Active since 2007

First Black woman to chart in Country music since 1987.

Check out "Sweet Sweet Lovin'" and "Seeds"

Arnold Shultz

Ohio County, Ky.

- Fiddle, Guitar
- Active: 1920s-1931

Gave Bill Monroe his first paid gig. Came up with a thumb-style picking later used by Chet Atkins, Doc Watson, and Merle Travis.

Check out the project "Shultz's Dream"

Tray Wellington

Ashe County, N.C.

- Banjo, Guitar
- Active since late 2010s

IBMA Momentum Award winner as a teen.

Check out "Port of Manzanita" and "Wasted Time"

BLACK BANJO
RECLAMATON PROJECT

Sulé Greg Wilson with two students from the Chicago build. Photo by Sulyiman Stokes.

cont'd from front page

end up dismissing the experiences of Black people, which excludes our participation. By teaching and learning banjo playing, building, and repair with African and Black-centered perspectives, our unique facilitation of programs highlights cultural practices, and creates a liberatory framework for people working and playing in these realms of folk music. Connecting this cultural relationship between the banjo and things like land stewardship, economic solidarity, and self determination opens pathways for music as a tool for transforming and restoring not just ourselves and how we see music, but how we show up in our world.

BB: How did you come to find yourself taking this on?

HM: I'm grateful the banjo has been a guide in all of our arriving here. I am also here with you as someone who shares a love of music, and as a facilitator and as a peer.

I feel the deep need for growth in the ways that the banjo is displayed and used by the people who participate in the music.

As you may know, there has been a long and rich history of the banjo in Black communities. We started BBRP five years ago as a recent development inspired by the work and expression of Black artists, past, present and future. It has been a long and wild journey that for me started simply from my love and interest in the banjo. I'll share a bit of my story:

BBRP's Hannah Mayree

I grew up in California, and I was fortunate to grow up with so much music in my life through my family. Although my mother is a strings player and teacher, I was never exposed to the banjo while in California.

It really started for me as a 20-year-old hobo and traveler going to places like western New York, northern Florida – where my closest ancestors came from – New Orleans, and Appalachia. I was on foot, hitch-hiking and yes, even stowing away on freight trains. This is how I came in contact with the banjo and how I was first exposed to many Bluegrass, Country and Folk music circles where I was able to learn and play.

I returned to California, where I started transitioning from busking on the streets to performing on the stage, both in bands and as a solo act. This was a huge opportunity to experience people's reaction to my being featured as a Black banjo player, while sharing information about the true origins of the banjo, updating the stories learned about this music to tell them from an authentic, Black perspective.

BB: What specifically did you notice as your focus shifted from perhaps more of a traveler/seeker to cultural creative and artist?

HM: The more I found myself playing out as a banjo player, there were things I started noticing that disturbed me. First, A lot of people, of many different backgrounds, do not know where the banjo comes from. There is a high barrier of entry for many Black people who want to play and own a banjo. Manufactured banjos are thousands of dollars. Banjo camps aren't cheap, either. If you can even get to one. There aren't many Black banjo teachers. There was and is a lack of Black luthiers making banjos professionally, and therefore, the people profiting from the sale and manufacturing of banjos are white. The knowledge of how to make a banjo was not readily available in Black communities even though it is an ancestral craft and practice.

The banjo needs to be stewarded, recreated, and played by African heritage protectors in order to reconnect us to its African origin and our land-based and spiritual traditions that come with it.

All of these factors inspired and fueled the creation of the BBRP.

BB: With all these experiences at heart, how has the Project unfolded since its inception?

HM: Our first program, in the winter of 2018, collected and distributed banjos to folks who longed to play but did not have access to nor the funds to purchase one. Since then we have distributed around 60 banjos by appealing to folks inspired by this cause to donate a working instrument, and delivering these instruments to the people asking for and needing them.

In 2019, I started hosting regular workshops in Oakland for Black folks who wanted to learn the banjo in-person, with community, with myself, and other guest teachers such as Sulé Greg Wilson. We also hosted several potlucks where we are able to jam, explore, and experience the music, firsthand.

We began 2020 with one of our biggest advancements to date, hosting the first-ever banjo-building workshop designed to give Black folks the opportunity to learn to build a banjo from start to finish.

Our teachers were two amazing white woodworkers from Washington state, Paul and Joanne, who truly made this possible. They came down with many supplies, ready to transfer the valuable knowledge they gained from generations of woodworkers directly into the BBRP.

It was incredible that the timing allowed for this to happen just before COVID lockdowns shut everything down, and that so many people supported this happening from around the country.

The following year we held our second-ever banjo build in Chicago. I was invited to teach this workshop by an administrator at the Old Town School of Folk Music who had heard about our work, Arif Smith. Myself and Sulé were blessed to work with a group of teenagers on the West Side, which spread the work further and to more age groups.

BB: That's an amazing amount of progress across a time when, well, it was hard to get anything moving. It must be satisfying to see the participation and support for the project, as well.

HM: This work has truly been a huge blessing. For me, I am seeing the impact of what it means for Black, African-diasporic people to reconnect with the music of the banjo and the ancestral art of building them. There are now several people across the nation who hold this knowledge and can and will teach it as we continue our programs.

BB: Have you been doing all this on your own, or have others from other communities shown up to help?

HM: We have provided tools and support to grow our leadership and expand our programs – this has been one of our most important attributes. I was really passionate about this, so I was able to set a lot of things in motion as things got started in 2019. However as we have grown, there has been a shift toward collective leadership.

We have also found support from so many individuals and organizations, including from white folks who are feeling called to create a new culture for themselves around the banjo. Bubbaville, in Portland, Ore.; Pisgah Banjos, in Asheville, N.C.; as well as the International Bluegrass Music Association, have been amongst some of our organizational supporters in the last year. There are also a handful of individuals who have come forward with large contributions to support programming that has been truly impactful.

Scenes from the Port Townsend workshop, where each person designed and built their own banjo. Processing an animal hide, top. Photos by Le'Ecia Farmer.

Sacramento banjo-building workshop. Photo by Ashleigh Castro.

This work is incredibly expansive and we have continued focusing on healing as we relate to donors, and the many people who stand to benefit from the work, from any background.

BB: It was once said that learning to play music is learning to be a better person – but it's doubtful that we often think of healing in the Bluegrass community as the subject of conversation around the jam circle. So, what is, perhaps, your highest goal?

HM: Examining racism and its connection to the banjo has connected us to white folks who are seeking a liberatory way to address white supremacy, even if the banjo seems like an unlikely way to do that. We feel the support of our ancestors and the people who have created a pathway for this work such as Gambian akontining player and researcher, Daniel Lamou Jatta. At the core of this work, we are healing with the land and healing with people as we pursue expression and creativity through music.

My hope is that we can inspire people in all communities to do similar work honoring their own benevolent ancestors and seeking to heal those parts of us that have been damaged when ancestors have harmed others to survive. Seeking out the music of our ancestors and respecting all that they went through, even knowing that many of them caused or endured harm, or both, can be an aspect of that healing. Our own trauma sometimes prevents us from looking at the truth, but we have found a lot of healing in doing so in a caring way, allowing us to show up as we are and be met in that place.

I'm sharing this with you because I want to invite you to be part of this expansive journey in relation to the Black Banjo Reclamation Project. The reasons are many and in this conversation, there may emerge more questions than answers.

BB: Thanks for sharing that vision with us. We're looking forward to the journey.

HM: You're welcome. We have worked really hard to involve as many people as we can in this process of healing and changing our world for the better. I do hope that this can be the start of further collaborations and opportunities to learn and grow together.

I thank you for taking the time and energy to consider these deep questions. Thank you so much to the CBA for inviting me to be part of your community. I really look forward to the ways that we will continue changing and advancing together as we appreciate music and all the facets that make it possible for us to engage with these rich histories and cultures that we are tied to.

Learn more about Hannah Mayree and the Black Banjo Reclamation Project at

blackbanjoreclamationproject.org

Meet our LIFETIME MEMBERS

JACK SADLER

1986 CBA LIFETIME MEMBER
by Phil Boerner

In the early 1970s, Jack Sadler hosted legendary chicken n' pickin' parties in the Bay area. At one of those parties, Jack and Jake Quesenberry thought of forming a Bluegrass association. When Jake met banjo player Carl Pagter in 1974, the California Bluegrass Association was born. Besides being one of the founding members of the CBA (he is member #3), Jack is also one of the five original members of the Santa Clara Valley Fiddlers Association.

The first three CBA members: Carl Pagter, Jack Sadler, Jake Quesenberry.

Born in Oklahoma in 1930, Jack came with his family to California in 1936, where they picked cotton and peaches. He first learned to play guitar and mandolin, and then at age 13 he bought his first fiddle. He and his wife Janet moved to San Francisco in the 1950s at the start of the folk music boom, which inspired him to learn the five-string banjo. Jack was a dentist for 30 years, retiring in 1990.

In the early 1970s, Jack and Ron White formed the Overlook Mountain Boys, a Bluegrass group in Los Gatos. Jack was the lead singer and banjo player; later he played fiddle. The OMB played for about 20 years at festivals, including CBA's, as well as at other events.

In 1994 Jack became the leader, fiddler, and harmony vocalist for Lone Prairie, a western cowboy music band. In 1999, Jack was the Western Music Association's yodeling champion. Lone Prairie recorded two CDs and performed until 2010 at festivals throughout the Western U.S.

Thank you, Jack, for your lifetime commitment to Bluegrass music and CBA.

Jack Sadler (2nd from left) plays banjo with Salt Flats Hoedown in 1977.

Art Kee (L) and Jack Sadler (R) play twin fiddles for Lone Prairie in 2006.

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JOIN US MAY 3-7, 2023 FOR CBA'S JULIAN FIDDLE CAMP

The Julian Family Fiddle Camp was founded in 2011 by Avery Ellisman and, with the exception of the so-called "COVID years," has been held each spring since in beautiful Julian. The California Bluegrass Association is proud to have JFFC now produced under its banner, with Avery continuing to serve as the camp's director.

As in the past, JFFC 2023 will be a 4.5-day music immersion experience for people of all ages. It provides small group instruction in guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, upright bass, and vocals by some of the best musicians in North America. Meals are included in the price of tuition, and a variety of accommodations are available.

In addition to music classes and workshops, there are two evening concerts and many non-music activities to enjoy – from guided hikes, to archery, a climbing tower and even a pie-making workshop! It is fun for individuals and families, with many JFFC alumni returning each year to meet old friends and make new ones.

Whether you're an advanced player or a so-called "beginner-mediate," you'll find your place at camp. You'll enjoy the guidance of great instructors and the support of peers as you advance your playing skills and increase your repertoire of tunes.

NEW JAM IN WILDOMAR!

by Donna Hargis, Regional Director, Huntington Beach

Montague Brothers Coffee in Wildomar

A new jam is born at Montague Brothers Coffee Shop in Wildomar, created by Joe Encee after he was inspired by his experience at South State 48 in November.

Joe has played guitar for years, but during the pandemic, he discovered his love for Bluegrass. He started taking online lessons with Bryan Sutton and catapulted into flatpicking, but he hadn't really jammed with anyone until South State 48.

Joe was one of the locals who made SS48 a day trip. After having his mind blown by the whole jamming experience, Joe looked for a local jam and found there were none in his area. He reached out to Ted Kuster, CBA's regional directors coordinator, who he met at the festival. He asked Ted how he might start a jam and was told how easy it was; just find a location and get the word out.

Joe picked the coffee shop where his two sisters work, because they were already musician-friendly, and the shop is a cool place. He put the word out on social media and put it on the CBA calendar. Wildomar is a rural area, but it has a lot of musicians, so Joe was confident that people would show up.

The inaugural jam drew seven pickers and everything but a fiddle. The ages ranged from "still-in-braces" to "needs a knee brace." The skill level was beginner-friendly. And it was awesome.

Jam Host Joe Encee.

This jam will continue on the 2nd Saturday of each month, but it's an early one, from 9:00 to 11:00 in the morning! But hey, there is great coffee, so if you live within a reasonable distance, go meet Joe Encee and pick a few.

Bluegrass Jam in Wildomar
2nd Saturdays from 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.
at Montague Brothers Coffee

BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN
Please share questions, suggestions, or story ideas at breakdown@californiabluegrass.net
FEB 2023

Monthly Trivia Quiz

by Bert Daniel

Well, there was something, um, fishy about our December trivia question!

It appears many of our CBA members like the electric life, too. David Brown, Gary Falxa, Keith Frankel, Bob Free, Jack Frost, Louis Kaplan, Jim Lappin, Jeff McGill, Tonya Newstetter, Joe Readel, Melinda Russell, Cary Taylor, Peter Thompson, David White and Mary Wonderly all know that **Phish is the Rock 'n' Roll band that 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.** Mary Wonderley won the random drawing for a CBA t-shirt.

Phish put on The Baker's Dozen shows the year after Kenny Baker's passing.

FEBRUARY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

One blazed a trail for Charlie Pride, the other for Merle Travis.

Name both of these musicians who played wiith Bill Monroe.

Send your answers to:

trivia@bluegrass.net

no later than February 28.

This month's prize is a Paige guitar or banjo 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 April 2023 Bluegrass Breakdown.


Photo by Robin Frenette

Great 48 in Bakersfield was such fun! Visit cbaphotos.zenfolio.com for some great photos of the weekend.

BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN
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BLACK BANJO AND FIDDLE FELLOWSHIP AT OAKLAND PUBLIC CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

by The Bluegrass Breakdown

The application deadline for the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music's two-year, paid fellowship for Black musicians to learn banjo and fiddle from Black instructors is February 15.

The ideal candidates for the Black Banjo and Fiddle Fellowship will already have musical proficiency on their instruments, which need not already be banjo or fiddle.

In the first year, fellows will engage in intensive coursework focused on the history and performance of the banjo and fiddle by Black musicians.

Faculty includes Jake Blount, a CBA 2023 Father's Day Festival performer and award-winning, Black multi-instrumentalist and music scholar; Tony Thomas, a leading historian of banjo origins and the history of Black banjo playing; and Earl White, a Black fiddler, clogger, teacher, and tune collector – and former resident of Santa Cruz – now living in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia.

"This is really about creating a safe Black space," said Angela Wellman, OPC's founding director and CEO. "As well as a repatriation, a reclaiming, of Old-Time music."

In year two, the fellows will lead jams and teach at the Oakland Public Conservatory of Music.

"Everyone can come to the jam sessions," Wellman said.

For more information about the fellowship, please contact Amber McZeal at ambermczeal@gmail.com.