



# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

Preserving and growing bluegrass, old-time, gospel, and traditional music in California since 1974.



YOUTH  
ISSUE

May 2023

## YOUTH ACADEMY RETURNS TO GRASS VALLEY

by Darby Brandli, CBA President Emeritus

For the past decade, the **CBA Youth Academy** has been a cornerstone of our Youth Program at the Father's Day Bluegrass Festival. Nothing but a dream for many years, today the academy is a four-day music camp for 8-16 year-olds, offering beginning and intermediate instruction in fiddle, guitar, banjo, bass, mandolin, and voice. The CBA Kids on Bluegrass program focuses kids on working together on stage performance, by contrast, the academy is a fun and immersive educational experience for kids to develop their instrumental, vocal, and band skills under guidance of a staff of experienced instructors. Kids work closely with instructors in small groups, thus we limit the attendance to 50 each year. Loaner instruments are available from the CBA Instrument Lending Library.

In the academy's early years, CBA contracted with the Alaska-based Bluegrass Camps for Kids, then run by Kate Hamre of Bearfoot Bluegrass, to produce the program. It was an immediate success, with 35 kids participating in the first year. In 2018 CBA brought the program management in-house, with Justin Hiltner as our first academy director. Since 2019, we've been very fortunate to have Kimber Ludiker of Della Mae as director. Kimber is a three-time winner of the National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest, and brings an experienced perspective and contagious enthusiasm to the program.

Professional musicians, experienced youth band members, and former academy students typically make up the faculty. Under Kimber's leadership, we have a newly-created path for youngsters to mentor future leaders and faculty. An offshoot of



Introductions at '22 Youth Academy. Photo by Alan Bond.

a previous VolunTeen program, Kimber brought on a group of teaching assistants to learn these skills. Last year, members of North Country Blue, a popular band of teenage musicians, volunteered as teaching assistants. This year's TAs will be from the Pacifica Music Program, led by Jared Katz. We see a future when the academy director will even come from the CBA Youth Program ranks.

This year's CBA Youth Academy starts the day before the festival begins, on Wednesday afternoon, and culminates in a joyous performance at 3 p.m. Saturday on the Pioneer Stage. The cost is \$300 for CBA members or \$350 for non-members, with scholarships available. CBA Youth Academy is made possible by generous donations from our community. Learn more or donate at [cbayouthprogram.com](http://cbayouthprogram.com)



Thanks to Darby Brandli for stewarding this issue of the Bluegrass Breakdown, focused on our youth. Take it away, Darby! – Pete Ludé

## CELEBRATING CBA KIDS

by Darby Brandli, CBA President Emeritus

I often remark to people what a privilege it is to watch our “Kids on Bluegrass” grow up to be fine adults who continue to give back to the CBA. I was reminded by one of those same “kids” that privilege is a two way street when he wrote: “I’m living a pretty dangd fortunate and musical life, due in large part to the support of the CBA community. Thank you for the encouragement, tutelage, and friendship over all these years.”

I am proud to be able to introduce our readers to this issue which is all about kids, music, mentors, teachers, moms (Happy Mother's Day!) and how they all have been at the heart of the CBA from the beginning. We want to show off what we have created with kids during our first 50 years, and how we are creating new ways for young people to come into this musical community, passing this music down the way it always has been—by playing it together.

We travel in time to the genesis of our internationally-renowned Kids On Bluegrass program, and to the future of bluegrass that will be fostered in schools thanks to

*cont'd on page 2 →*



Kathy and daughter Juniper Waller. Photo by Bob Free.

## A MOTHER'S DAY MEMOIR

by Kathy Kallick

When I started telling people I was expecting a baby, the first thing most people asked was, “Awww, what about the band?” People assumed I would stop playing music.

But everyone in the Good Ol' Persons really wanted to keep playing and touring, so they all agreed to pitch in and help. I took my first child with me pretty much everywhere I went. We all figured, “Well, she's small, and babies love riding in the car – and they just sleep!”

It's true that she was small, but her opinion was mighty! And she certainly did not sleep through long car rides. I wound up

telling her stories, making her socks into puppets, singing her songs, and cajoling her to some resemblance of quietude in any ways I could.

I had to be creative, like changing her diaper in my guitar case when we were doing a festival workshop in a sea of mud – or sneaking down to the breakfast room of a German bed-and-breakfast with her in the middle of the night to watch the cuckoo come out of a clock.

The band was really helpful. John Reichsman held shadow puppets shows

*cont'd on page 3 →*



## CELEBRATING CBA KIDS

cont'd from front page

the passing of Proposition 28 last year, the myriad youth activities at the Father's Day Festival each June, and the launch of our Online Academy.

You will meet a dozen or so young people who have full-time careers in music. You'll also hear from some of our favorite instructors about what makes working with young people in music so special.

The excellence and leadership our young people are showing in the bluegrass community is inspiring. Since 2011, the International Bluegrass Music Association's Momentum Awards have been recognizing outstanding musicians just beginning their careers in bluegrass. We are very proud of the many nominees and winners from our ranks: Annie Staninec, 2015 Instrumentalist of the Year; Melody Walker, 2016 Vocalist of the Year; Molly Tuttle, 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year; AJ Lee, 2019 Vocalist of the Year; Kara Kundert, 2021 Industry Involvement Award winner; and Kimber Ludiker, 2022 Mentor of the Year. No other bluegrass association can claim so many winners.

We are just as proud of the young people who continue to attend our events as fans and members of the CBA. It is from this group that most of our future CBA leaders will grow. We can find more ways to mentor the next generation of volunteers and program directors. Helen Foley, the director of Kids on Bluegrass, and Nate Schwartz, the director of Bluegrass Bridge, are shining examples of what the



Darby Brandli and Jack Tuttle. Photo by Alan Bond.

future of the CBA will look like if we continue to foster youth leadership in bluegrass and support it with innovative programs like the CBA Lending Library.

I am so sorry to hear of the sudden and unexpected death of Bay Area musician, performer, author, and teacher Dix Bruce. Our community lost a bright light.

CBA members can support the CBA Youth Program in many ways. Follow and cheer them on on social media. Enroll your kids and grandchildren in some of our activities. Volunteer. Donate. Reach out.

Learn more and get involved in the CBA Youth Program!



## BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

May 2023 • Youth Edition

The Bluegrass Breakdown is the monthly publication of the California Bluegrass Association since April 1975, keeping CBA members and the world of bluegrass up-to-date with coverage of CBA events, musicians, promotions, and volunteer opportunities. Each issue is published as both a printed and a digital newsletter and distributed to more than 7,500 readers around the world.

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## A MOTHER'S DAY MEMOIR

*cont'd from front page*

and carried little Jenny all over Europe in a backpack. Kevin Wimmer played the accordion on long rides in the van – we made up the “Bye Bye Kitty Zydeco” to entertain a 14-month-old. Sally Van Meter played with her while I had a shower and a nap.

When Jenny started walking in England, being strapped into a car seat for hours was just not working for anyone. So the band put us on a train where we could walk up and down the aisles for hours, and then they met us later in the town where we were playing.

We had a series of “nannies” — fans and friends who volunteered to come along for fun. All expenses paid, but they did not always have a ton of fun. We wore out the nannies pretty quickly because it's exhausting to tour, and the nanny didn't get the fun part of playing the music!

We had to send one nanny home part way through a five-week tour of Europe; luckily, our wonderful driver took over as “Papa Johannes.”

By the time Jenny was about 3 1/2, she tired of touring herself. She announced to me, “I hate touring, Mommy. I hate the smell of airplanes, I miss my dad, I miss my dog. I quit the band.” I'd felt all along that as long as we were together, we were all good. The baby was with her mom, and that was what was important. But by the time she was old enough to say that

big sentence, she was old enough to stay home without me, be in preschool, and we'd both feel fine.

She came along some after that, but not every time. Jenny had made a lot of fans and friends herself. As she is now a full-time, touring musician, it apparently did her no harm, and she seems to feel okay about that life-on-the-road stuff. 🐘



*Kathy and her daughter with Bill Monroe. Photo courtesy Kathy Kallick.*

## JIM NUNALLY SHARES MEMORIES OF DIX BRUCE

by Jim Nunally

Dix Bruce was foremost a dedicated husband to Kathi, a father to their daughter Gennie, and a father-in-law to Dan. What fun he had being a dad – he had great stories. He also had the wonderful joy of being a grandad, and had so much fun with Cici and Tilly. He loved his family.

His second love was music, and he dedicated most of his life to it. He was a real working musician, hustling gigs wherever he could find them. One of Dix's other primary music-related jobs was writing instructional books for Mel Bay Publications. He wrote around 60 music instruction books for them, including a popular series of music books called “Parking Lot Pickers.” Dix was a musician's musician. If you wanted to learn bluegrass, blues, jazz, folk, country and various other types of music, he could teach it, play it, and he probably wrote an instructional book about it.

He had a long history with David Grisman, Mike Marshall, and Darol Anger, and was a partner with them in Mandolin World News. He eventually went on to be the publisher and basically owner of this revered publication among mandolin enthusiasts, featuring every great mandolinist known, and some unknown.



*Dix Bruce and Jim Nunally. Photo by Charlotte Gibb.*

Dix played with so many great musicians in jazz, blues, rock, folk, and country. He composed many songs for the computer game The Sims, and performed with mandolin legend Frank Wakefield.

Dix also worked at Arhoolie Records as well as doing many other music-related jobs; including recording engineer and music teacher. He was a wonderful songwriter. He also wrote music columns for many publications. He released two of his own CDs: Tuxedo Blues and My Folk Heart.

In this world you can only hope to ever have a kind, loving, honest, fair, super talented, and funny friend in your life, I am fortunate to have had that with Dix Bruce. Dix and I recorded four duo CDs together, and toured a lot together from around 1995-2005. We also worked for Martin Guitar Company as clinicians, where we traveled to stores all over the Western states with Martin Guitar reps Joe McNamara and Larry Barnwell. It was a dream job for a musician: go to music stores, play great guitars, and get paid for it! Dix, as he is now, was in heaven.

I first came to know about Dix when he was playing in a San Francisco Bay Area band called Back Up and Push. Later he joined the incredible dixieland band The Royal Society Jazz Orchestra. He later had his own version of the Dix Bruce Jazz Band. He more recently had a duo with vocalist and mandolinist Julie Cline and released two CDs.

Dix was born and raised in Wisconsin. He learned music from his grandfather, in fact, he played his grandfather's 1950's D-21 Martin guitar, which he inherited, on all of our CDs and most of the other folk and country recordings he made. He was such a talented multi-instrumentalist. He played guitar, tenor banjo, autoharp, harmonica, and bass.

Goodbye, ol' pal. You will live on through your music and great great great grandchildren – forever. 🐘





Donna Hargis and student pickers. Photo courtesy Donna Hargis.

# PICKING BETWEEN THE BELLS

## BLUEGRASS IN THE SCHOOLS

by Donna Hargis, SoCal Regional Director

Now it is perhaps more possible than ever to bring bluegrass into schools, thanks to last year's passage of California's Proposition 28, the "The Arts and Music in Schools – Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act."

Austin Beutner, the author of the bill, had this to say in about the measure in the Desert Sun last November: "Prop. 28 will make sure every student from preschool to 12th grade will have the opportunity to participate in arts and music at school."

This initiative brings a windfall of funding for arts and music education to California schools – a total of over \$900 million in new funds starting with the 2023-2024 school year. At least 80 percent of the funds are earmarked for paying certified and classified school employees providing classroom arts and music education, with the rest to go to support services, supplies and partnership programs.

In many schools, electives have been pushed out of many schools over the past few decades, to the point that music or art classes simply do not exist. Students' schedules are packed with academic work and often sports, but not everyone can sign up for a dance or singing class, or to learn to play an instrument.

The bluegrass community needs kids, and kids need us. Not just because the music is amazing, but because bluegrass is a social genre that teaches much

needed skills. Jamming involves face-to-face communication, where people sit in a circle and take turns. It requires eye contact. It requires reading non-verbal cues. It develops fortitude, integrity, humility, and perseverance. The post-pandemic world needs more of this and less swiping.

I'm no longer surprised when kids ask me, "What is bluegrass?" but I was surprised when someone suggested, "You should start a bluegrass club here at school." So I did. We meet once a week during lunch. The CBA Lending Library provided instruments, then I put the word out. Now I have eight students and two teachers who come regularly, with overwhelming support from our staff. We are having a blast.

Regulations unusually mandate secondary teachers be credentialed in music to teach a specific class, but not to start a club. Anyone who can lead a jam and works with kids can take the lead, and there are more resources than ever to help get started.

Eric Nordbeck ran a successful bluegrass program at West Palm Conservatory Elementary School in the high desert outside Victorville for 25 years! Eric recently retired, but still comes in twice a week to help Scott Sandoval, who has since taken over the program. Both teach and pick, and share this wonderful music with kids who often have not heard of bluegrass. A

few stick with it, some move on to other genres, but all have the experience of creating music and being a part of a community. Perhaps you've seen their students when they've graced the main stage at the Huck Finn Jubilee!

Eric said that, thanks to instrument donations from the [CBA and SouthWest Bluegrass Association], he's never had to turn down a kid who wants to learn. Your donated instruments will find their way to kids, so keep them coming!

Another amazing example is Jared Katz, who runs a bluegrass program at Cabrillo Elementary School in Pacifica, where he has been a third grade teacher for 16 years. The bluegrass program has been running for nine years, and Jared has experienced the joy of watching some of his young students grow into accomplished musicians. Jared teaches the older kids to mentor the younger kids, instilling in them a sense of community and an opportunity to give back, plus he can use all the good help he can get!

Teachers who are willing and able to convince their school districts to pilot a bluegrass or folk music program as a regular part of their curriculum can rest assured that the voters of California have asked for it, the money is there, and the CBA has the instruments available. We have the resources to plant seeds and show the kids a way to connect, without using wifi.



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# CLOVIS' BLUEGRASS IN THE PARK 2023 LINEUP RELEASED

By Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Central San Joaquin Regional Director

Bluegrass in the Park in Clovis. File photo.

We are excited for the 15th season of "Bluegrass in the Park" in Clovis! This series of free concerts, co-sponsored by the CBA and the Clovis Veteran's Memorial Park District, are held from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Fridays, in Liberty Park at 901 Fifth Street, in Clovis. Come early, bring a lawn chair and a picnic dinner!

Three bands from out-of-town will have their debut appearance this year: Dirty Cello, West 45, and the Dos Valley Trio. The local Celtic quartet Pipe on the Hob will perform an all-Scottish program and tribute to Bill Monroe (who was very proud of his Scottish heritage). Twelve other bands and one solo performer will provide a mix of bluegrass and old-time, with a little swing thrown into the mix by the GillyGirls Band.

Follow us online  
for more info and  
event updates!



## Friday Concert Series 6:30-8:30pm - Liberty Park, Clovis - Free Admission

May 12	<b>Dirty Cello</b>	Rebecca Roudman (cello, fiddle, vocals), Jason Eckl (guitar), Greg Studley (mandolin), Colin Williams (bass)
May 19	<b>Red Dog Ash</b>	Shane Kalbach (fiddle/vocals), Mark Peet (banjo), Gary Vessel (mandolin/vocals), Mark Eagleton (bass), and Jason Winfree (guitar/vocals)
May 26	<b>Green Bush Spring</b>	Americana songs and tunes: Terry Barrett (fiddle/mandolin), Larry Cusick (fiddle), Karana Hattersley-Drayton (vocals/keyboard), John McDaniel (mandolin/guitar)
June 2	<b>West 45</b>	Mei Lin Heirendt (fiddle/vocals), Hal Horn (banjo/vocals), Bruce Lacey (bass vocals), Ida Winfree (mandolin/vocals), Jason Winfree (guitar/vocals)
June 9	<b>Ripe for Pickin'</b>	Donn Beedle (fiddle, viola, mandolin and vocals), Kevin Campbell (vocals and guitar), Pat Kemble (Dobro), Tom Naiman (banjo and vocals), John Mooneyham (bass)
June 16	<b>Pipe on the Hob</b>	All Scottish Program/Tribute to Bill Monroe: Donn Beedle (fiddle/viola), Karana Hattersley-Drayton (keyboard/vocals), Carl Johnsen (hammer dulcimer/flutes), Kathryn Johnsen (Celtic harp/keyboard/harmony vocals)
June 23	<b>Evo Bluestein</b>	Traditional Americana songs and tunes on fiddle, banjo and autoharp
	<b>Bad Actors</b>	Contemporary bluegrass: Doug Bremseth (guitar/mandolin), Bruce Honeyman (guitar/mandolin)
June 30	<b>Ed Bell Band</b>	Stan Allen (bass/vocals), Richard Rhyne (lead guitar), Steve Quintana (rhythm guitar/vocals), Ed Bell (mandolin/guitar/vocals)
July 7	<b>Dos Valley Trio</b>	Old-time American string band: Terry Barrett (fiddle/mandolin), Cindy Liedstrand (guitar), Harry Liedstrand (fiddle)
July 14	<b>Bluegrass Element</b>	Doug Carlton (Dobro/harmony vocals), Bob Garcia (mandolin/vocals), Jonathan Hall (bass), Steve Hall (banjo), Michael McDonald (guitar/vocals)
July 21	<b>Sugar Pine</b>	Chuck Thrapp (guitar/vocals), Dave Novell (guitar/vocals), Robyn Flory (Vocals), Jeff Gurule (banjo/vocals), Ron "Bearrr" Murrey (bass /vocals)
<b>SEPTEMBER (Concerts start at 6 pm)</b>		
September 1	<b>Grass Less Traveled</b>	Mike Gibson (guitar/vocals), Michael McDonald (mandolin/vocals), Steve Hall (banjo), Jonathan Hall (bass), and Doug Carlton (Dobro/vocals)
September 8	<b>Sycamore Bend</b>	Dan Stein (guitar/vocals), Michael McDonald (mandolin/vocals), Doug Carlton (Dobro/vocals), Steve Hall (banjo), Jonathon Hall (bass)
September 15	<b>The GillyGirls Band</b>	Savannah Gillingham (mandolin/fiddle/vocals), Morgan (mandolin/bass/vocals), Hailey guitar/vocals), Jillian (mandolin/banjo/bass/vocals)
September 22	<b>Uncle Ephus</b>	Linda Dryden (vocals/autoharp), Doug Cornelius (vocals/ washboard), Ron Zastovnik (mandolin), Barbara Larae Brown (Dobro/ banjo), Ed Hawk (bass), Steve Barnett (guitar), Jean Kilpatrick (fiddle)





# BRING YOUTH INTO BLUEGRASS WITH THE CBA KIDS LENDING LIBRARY

by Darby Brandli, CBA President Emeritus

CBA Youth Academy performance at 2022 Father's Day Festival. Photo by Alan Bond.

Many fans of the music coming from CBA Youth Program participants past and present might not know it, but many of the instruments sharing the spotlight with this ever-growing group of musicians are on loan to them through our own Darrell Johnston Kids Instrument Lending Library.

CBA members – myself included – supported Kids on Bluegrass since its inception in the 1980s by donating more than once to a purchase fund to furnish a kid with a better instrument. In early 2004, then-CBA treasurer Darrell Johnston quietly presented a fiddle to an aspiring young fiddler with an older sibling who was playing in a family new to bluegrass.

One of the library's first custodians, Sharon Elliott, recalled in a 2008 post on a Mandolin Cafe forum, "Seeing the potential for all four kids playing music, Darrell thought about creating a kids instrument lending library that would provide children with instruments when they might not be able to afford one, let alone four!"

He started with a Dobro he had at home, and presented his idea to the CBA board of directors. Tragically, before the library was created, Darrell died from a heart attack.

Sharon and Steve Elliott took up the mantle, and stored the increasing inventory at their home in Castro Valley. In 2005, the CBA officially took on the library as a part of its youth programming.

Sharon and Steve became the founders and keepers of the library for at least a decade before handing it off to Bruce Long, who had a barn on his property in which to house the collection. Randy January took over from Bruce in 2012, renting a climate-controlled storage space in Roseville for storage.

Randy brought the library into the Modern Age by photographing and digitizing the inventory. He also aspired to see borrowers to get automatic emails reminding them to renew their memberships or return unused instruments through our membership database.

The Kids Lending Library has won support from folks beyond CBA over the years. Scott Tichenor of Mandolin Cafe fame has twice organized fundraisers for the program. The first fundraiser was for cash and mandolins, but the second fundraiser in 2015 also targeted instrument makers. David Harvey of Gibson Instrument Company in Nashville, Tenn., Two Old Hippies Stringed Instruments, also of Nashville, The Music Link in Hayward, The Loar Mandolin, Deering Banjo Company, the 5th String Music Store in Berkeley, luthier Stan Miller, and David Grisman have all made donations to the library.

Sharon Khadder took over as Lending Librarian from Randy in 2022, and the storage was moved from Roseville to Oakland.

We thinned the inventory of unplayable instruments, selling some of them to raise money for the new instruments and repairs thanks to the help of Mark Hogan.

We now only stock traditional bluegrass band instruments – fiddles, banjos, Dobros, mandolins, guitars, and upright bases. We don't provide solo or parlor instruments like mountain dulcimers or autoharps. We also stopped accepting donations of books, instructional DVDs, and tapes. We know what we can lend to young people – and what sits on the shelf for years and years.

Sharon, with the help of CBA's membership director Debbie Wendt, are working on linking the library inventory to our new membership database – bringing Randy's aspiration to life! Sharon has also been reaching out to our borrowers to retrieve the many instruments in need of repairs to get them back into playable shape, after being kept safe during the pandemic in their homes.

Over the years we have shared the generosity the library has generated in the community by sharing with other nonprofits and musical programs instruments we have not been able to lend to young people. We donated full-size guitars to Veterans Voices, to a Hispanic musical group, and recently to CBA's Bluegrass Bridge music program for people in prisons.

We appreciate all the donations over the years. We are glad to serve the need we see for children to have instruments that are easy to tune and sized for them to play.

Currently we need small basses, small guitars, and fractional-sized fiddles. Contact Sharon Khadder at [instruments@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:instruments@californiabluegrass.net) for information about donations or borrowing an instrument for your child!



Orion Cicoletti at the campsite of Sharon and Steve Elliott in 2009. CBA File Photo.

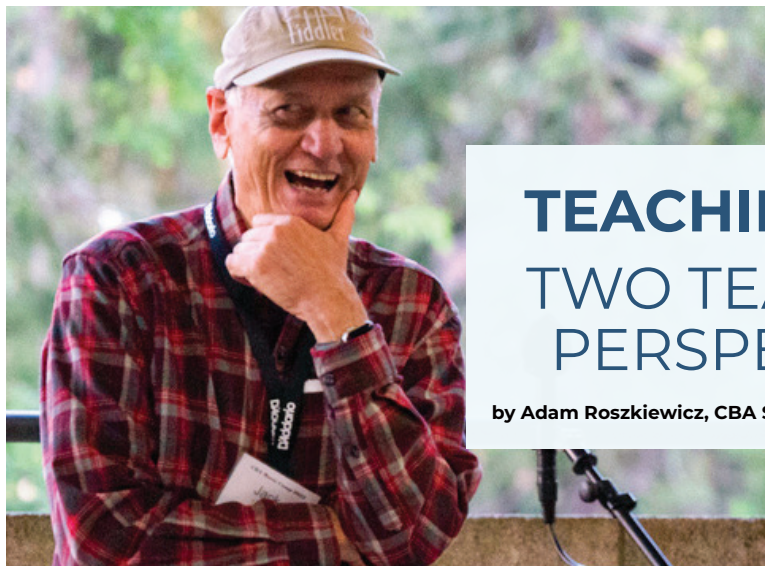


Off to an early start at 2014 Father's Day Festival. CBA File Photo.

Learn more and donate to the CBA Kids Lending Library







# TEACHING KIDS: TWO TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

by Adam Roszkiewicz, CBA Summer Music Camp Director



Jack Tuttle. Photo by Alan Bond.

Robin Fischer. Photo by Mike Melnyk.

*Fostering and nurturing a musical life for children can be incredibly rewarding, enlightening, and often challenging. It requires not only a thorough understanding of music in general and the physical instrument in question, but also an understanding of psychology and interpersonal relationships, as well as a good deal of intuition. The Bay Area has some great music teachers and teaching institutions for all styles of music, especially bluegrass and old time. We caught up with two Bay Area teachers from two different generations to ask them about their journeys and experiences teaching young people.*

**Robin Fischer** is a music teacher, fiddler, square dance caller, and organizer. Based in Berkeley, Robin teaches at Manning Music, calls dances at the North Oakland Square Dance, and performs with the Bearcat Stringband & Duo. Robin loves to connect people with music and demystify traditional art forms.

*When did you first start teaching?*

I started teaching fiddle to adults and kids in 2012.

*What is your current teaching situation?*

I teach private fiddle lessons at Manning Music alongside a whole crew of amazing music teachers. Although all the lessons I teach are one-on-one, I recently started a teen jam class for intermediate students that has become the highlight of my week!

*What are some of the challenges about teaching kids specifically? Are there some aspects of teaching kids that are easier than teaching adults?*

I really love teaching both adults and kids! I feel fortunate to be able to do both.

I think technique and attention span are the things that can be more difficult with kids – with little kids we are working with a much more limited vocabulary to discuss holding the instrument and playing it correctly. Also, competing for time with sports practice and games can be chaotic!

As far as benefits – I find kids often have more of a built-in support system that really benefits them – especially around practice time and performance expectations. It is often more difficult for adults to carve out regular practice time for themselves. I also had terrible, traumatic music

lessons growing up, so being a music teacher that gives fun, supportive lessons is very fulfilling for me.

*What do you think the best age to start learning an instrument is? This could be different depending on the instrument.*

I think this can be a delicate and quite individual question – it really depends on the student. Some people have the good fortune of starting quite young, getting teachers they connect with, and finding a genre or instrument that inspires them. Some folks find the right fit later in life, and there is nothing wrong with that either. I prefer to take fiddle students no younger than five years old.

*How important are music camps/group learning environments for young learners?*

Group learning environments are amazing! The pandemic really limited opportunities for kids playing in groups. Seeing my students either get back to playing music in groups, or start playing with other kids for the first time, has been very moving. Everyone I teach who participates in group events is more motivated in lessons and practice, brings in songs they want to learn



Vickie Vaughan leads a song with kids at Father's Day Festival. Photo by Robin Frenette



Celia Woodsmith & Megan January teach Kids on Bluegrass. Photo by Robin Frenette.



that other kids are playing, are more confident, and – in my opinion most importantly – have a community of peers to play with.

*Do you have any standout or fun memories relating to your students taking part in Summer Music Camp, Youth Academy, or Kids on Bluegrass, etc..?*

Honestly, my kid students haven't participated in Grass Valley activities yet, but a number of them are this year – so high fives all around!

**Jack Tuttle** is originally from rural Illinois, and started teaching full time at Gryphon Stringed Instruments in 1979. He has taught thousands of students in the ensuing forty years, and has been especially successful with children, some of whom have grown into major talents on the local and national scene. Jack has also written twelve instructional books and developed seminars on the history of bluegrass, listening critically to bluegrass, bluegrass improvisation, and music theory for bluegrass.

Jack is no stranger to the Bay Area bluegrass scene or the CBA. In 2007, Jack was presented with the California Bluegrass Association's Distinguished Honorary Lifetime Membership Award and in 2014 he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Northern California Bluegrass Society.

*When did you first start teaching? When did you first start teaching kids?*

I first started teaching in 1979. I taught kids from the beginning, but really got a reputation as a teacher of kids in the late 1980's with the success of some of them, first in fiddle contests and later at kid's programs at bluegrass festivals.

*What is your current teaching situation?*

I currently teach online only. I pretty much carry a full load of students and because of that, I don't regularly accept new students.

*What are some of the challenges about teaching kids specifically? Are there some aspects of teaching kids that are easier than teaching adults?*

I don't think teaching kids is any harder, in general. The biggest key with kids is getting some self-motivation to kick in. It doesn't necessarily have to be there at the beginning, but without passion somewhere along the way, there will be limited success. Passion is a higher predictor of success than innate talent.

*What do you think the best age to start learning an instrument is?*

As for the correct age, I think it depends mostly on the maturity of the kid. I tend to prefer parents wait, rather than rush into getting their kids lessons. But it varies – Brittany Haas started when she was four; my daughter Molly when she was eight.

Probably best not to wait much past eight though.

*How important are music camps/group learning environments for young learners?*

This goes directly to the passion issue. Camps and festivals are the perfect breeding grounds for creating the passion. For many kids, it's the first time they see others their age learning bluegrass, so it's very confirming of their process.

*Do you have any standout or fun memories relating to your students performing/taking part in Summer Music Camp, Youth Academy, or Kids on Bluegrass, etc..?*

My first student who made waves at the Summer Music Camp was a 7 year-old girl named Frankie Nagle, who played guitar, had a huge voice, and sang tons of Jimmy Martin songs. She was one of those Grass Valley kid sensations, like we see now and then. Then, in 2003, my three kids participated in the Kids on Bluegrass program. Frank Solivan had me work as an unofficial assistant off to the side, and he sent me some of the top kids in his program. That's how we met AJ Lee and Angelica Grim, who we later started performing with. Molly ended up backing up a lot of players on stage.



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# KIDS ON BLUEGRASS

## CBA'S RENOWNED HOMEGROWN KIDS PICKING PROGRAM

by Frank Solivan



Kids on Bluegrass in its first days. Photo courtesy Frank Solivan.

Growing up in a musical family, I never knew a time without instruments hanging on walls, leaning in corners and taking up the dark spaces throughout the house. The same went for my dad, Frank Solivan Sr. He is 9th of ten music-loving and playing siblings.

My dad's mother Bonnie and her sisters were "tumblers" – acrobatic performers – and musicians in vaudevillian shows in their youth. Grandma Bonnie mainly played mandolin and fiddle, but also knew the guitar and bass. She instilled her deep

love and respect for music in all of her children – one of my aunts is even registered in the Western Swing Hall of Fame. Many of my dad's siblings either played or sang, or had a keen ear for what was high-quality music.

That all being said, my dad and mom took me to many family gatherings where music was a key component. The kids always had

the stage at some point and got to shine. In addition, my folks took me to many music festivals where the music community was like family. One of those festivals was the Father's Day Bluegrass Festival in Grass Valley.

When I was about 13 years old, I got my picking buddies together in Grass Valley to go play some tunes near the stage, in hopes of getting invited to play. Of course, my dad had instigated and encouraged the situation. The great Vern Williams walked up and a conversation between us ensued, ending with him saying, "You need to be on the stage... let me see what I can do." I believe he went to talk with the stage manager and such to see what could actually get done.

The backstage area seemed so unapproachable to me at the time! But with some encouragement and help from my dad, we ended up getting invited to play some songs towards the end of one of the dinner breaks. I had gotten a taste of the stage and my dad had something to connect him to kids – with his kid playing on the big stage.

Dad planted the seed for everyone involved

## FROM KOB TO PRO: YOUNG CAL



### PAIGE ANDERSON

Inspired by 2003's KOB performance, Paige went on to play with her family as the Anderson Family Bluegrass Band, play the IBMA KOB in 2005, and serve as and 2007 CBA Teen Ambassador. Today, Paige teams up with Emilee Rose as the duo Two Runner.



### ANGELICA BRANUM

Angelica (Grim) Branum was in KOB for 12 years, returning to the roots of bluegrass teaching voice for the acclaimed ETSU Department of Appalachian Studies' Bluegrass, Old-Time, and Roots Music Studies program. She performs with her husband Justin as The Branums.



### HELEN FOLEY

Helen's KOB experience included both the CBA and IBMA programs and a trip to perform in the IBMA KOB band at the 2015 La Roche Bluegrass Festival in La Roche, France, as the only Californian selected for the band. Today, Helen leads CBA's Kids on Bluegrass program.



### SCOTT GATES

Scott has been playing mandolin, guitar, and singing since he was 10 years old. Bluegrass writer Dave Berry said Scott is "a popular instructor for the next wave of California bluegrass talent" in Bluegrass Today. Today you can see him with AJ Lee and Blue Summit.



### JOHN GOODING

John picked up guitar at 7, and was a CBA and IBMA KOB not long after. He was a CBA Youth Ambassador, and served on the CBA Youth Academy faculty. Now John is a guitarist, mandolinist, and singer; and currently the guitar player for the Crying Uncle Bluegrass Band.



### JOSH GOODING

Josh was one of the CBA's first teen ambassadors, and was also in CBA's KOB for 12 years. He joins fellow KOB alum Angelica Branum at ETSU in Johnson City, Tenn., as an adjunct vocal instructor. Josh has also recently joined The Little Roy and Lizzy Show as the mandolin player.



### BRITTANY

Brittany is an instructor. recent pro featured Bentonville sister, cello, Padiddle R



### AJ LEE

AJ was m Obviously on to found is an awar is an, band le She won a 2019 for Vo



### MAX SCH

Max served played wit at IBMA 20 and a Girl. Leis and in Jamaica at three sc





Kids on Bluegrass on stage with Special Consensus at 2022 Father's Day Festival. Photo by John G. Woodworth.

that day – including the audience. Next came talking with the festival staff to see about the possibilities of making this kind of thing a viable situation for “the kids” to take part in the stage show the next go around. Seems it paid off.

Dad really didn’t have an outline at first, but I remember the next time I was together with my picking pals at the festival we were going to play some tunes on stage. My dad’s guidance included: getting a set list together, rehearsing the material to see what could work (stage banter or jokes were suggested), working the mic (smile), etcetera, etcetera. The basic structure for what would become “Kids On Bluegrass” was getting laid out in those first couple of years. It has been developing and going strong since that fateful day in 1989.

I will say, Kids on Bluegrass is not really a “music camp,” but more like a “bluegrass

music encouragement program,” where kids find community with their peers. Some are beginners, some are more advanced, but they all get a taste of the stage and get to feel what it’s like to be part of something. We as humans all want to belong, and Kids On Bluegrass gives kids a place to be part of something positive – a place where all that matters is how you treat one another and how to work together to be a band. It’s a place that gives the kids a sense of accomplishment, pride in themselves, and ultimately raises their self-esteem through the roof. It’s a beautiful thing to see the hundreds of kids that have been through the KOB program, many of whom have since become professional musicians, including Angelica (Grim) Branum, Molly Tuttle, Carly Ann (Smith) Kenison, Mike Tater Jr., Joe Ash, Paul and Loren Barton, and myself, to name a few.

Kids on Bluegrass has sparked other programs throughout the nation, as well. I have heard from many people involved in the festival circuit that Kids on Bluegrass was the inspiration they needed to get a

kid’s music program together at their festival. Mary Burdette from Grey Fox told me she had seen the program my dad was doing and needed to get something going at their festival. Now they have a wonderful kid’s academy. IBMA’s Kids on Bluegrass is a replication of our program at an international level!

“What I learned from the program was fundamental in working with kids in Alaska, some of whom created a band called Bearfoot that reached national and international recognition – and even formed a kids academy at the Rockygrass bluegrass festival in Lyons, Colorado.

It is exciting to see how the Kids on Bluegrass program has touched so many and continues to develop and evolve. I am thankful for the CBA’s continued commitment to supporting the next generation and I feel so lucky to have it as a part of my own musical history.”



Frank Solivan. CBA File Photo.

## CALIFORNIA STARS

### Y HAAS

is a sought-after fiddler and A bluegrass concerto by her project, Hawktail Trio, will be at this month’s FreshGrass (Ark.) festival. Brittany and her sister Natalie Haas, release HAAS on records later this month.



### NATE SCHWARTZ

Nate was a CBA Teen Ambassador during his KOB days, and went on to earn a degree in ethnomusicology from UCLA. He is a mandolin player, jazz composer, directs nationally-acclaimed CBA Bluegrass Bridge program, and the programming manager for Cloud Cover Music.



### FRANK SOLIVAN

Frank was there for the very first KOB. Since then, he’s become highly-regarded as a mandolinist, recording artist, composer, mentor, producer, and leader of the progressive and award-winning bluegrass band Dirty Kitchen.



### ANNIE STANINEC

Annie taught on the faculty of many CBA Music Camps since her days as a KOB. She won an IBMA Momentum Award in 2015 for Instrumentalist of the Year; became a sought-after instructor; authored a fiddle instruction book; and has played fiddle in the Kathy Kallick band since 2008.



### MOLLY TUTTLE

2022 Grammy winner for Bluegrass Album of the Year for Crooked Tree, Molly is a guitarist, singer, songwriter, and bandleader who “grew up in KOB,” and was a camp teacher. She won IBMA Momentum Award in 2016 for Instrumentalist of the Year; Guitar Player of the Year in 2017 and 2018, and Female Vocalist of the Year in 2022.



### SULLIVAN TUTTLE

Sullivan “Sully” Tuttle was a KOB for several years, and serial winner of the Northern California Bluegrass Society Guitar Player of the Year award for with his blisteringly-fast flatpicking. Today he is the guitarist in AJ Lee’s Blue Summit.



### MARTY VARNER

Marty is a mandolinist and guitarist who grew up performing with KOB and OMGG band at IBMA. Currently he performs with the Dusty Green Bones Band and Amy Novak Warren. While earning his master’s degree, he wrote a dissertation on bluegrass history.



# THE SPIRIT OF TEACHING

## THE MANNING MUSIC COMMUNITY

By Maggie Sokolik



Chad and Catherine Manning. Photo by Mike Melnyk.

Manning Music, a school for musicians of all levels and ages, is owned and run by Chad and Catherine Manning in Berkeley. The Mannings started their individual careers in teaching when they were teenagers, and continue this tradition by training young musicians to become teachers. They taught in backyard studios and spare rooms in their homes around the Bay Area. Now, their location is a multi-story studio and performance space on Fourth Street.

They are active teachers – Chad has over 70 mostly adult students and Catherine teaches nearly 50 young musicians. They also employ seven instructors: Robin Fischer, Rowan McCallister, Stash Wyslouch, Leah Wollenberg, Jasper Manning, Isla Dalton-Robinson, and Lucy Khadder.

Manning Music has hosted many musical workshops and gatherings – including workshops led by David Grisman, Keith Little, and Laurie Lewis, to name just a few – and is currently hosting jam classes led by Avram Siegel.

I recently sat down with Chad and Catherine to learn about Manning Music and the musical community they have fostered.

**Maggie: Catherine, what do you like about teaching young musicians?**

**Catherine:** I love teaching the little ones. They keep me on my toes. It takes a lot of energy, which is hard, but they say funny things, too. Yesterday, I reviewed what we're doing for the upcoming student concert with a four-year-old student. We finished, and I asked, "Do you have any questions?" He looked me in the eye and asked, "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Sometimes, they come to a lesson and just roll around on the floor.

**Chad:** When Catherine tells me these stories, I like to picture my adult students doing the same thing. [laughs]

**Catherine:** I also love seeing them grow. I have had so many students that started at three, and now they're in college and beyond. The arc of each student is different, but I like to see where they go. For some, music is just for fun; for others, it becomes their profession. I love seeing how music becomes a part of their lives.

**Maggie: What advice do you give parents who worry their kids aren't practicing?**

**Catherine:** Many parents ask what they should do if their kids won't practice. I tell them that if their kids enjoy coming to lessons, even if they're not practicing at home, that's okay. I guarantee that if they enjoy coming to lessons, they will learn to play music. Our philosophy is that we don't push practice.

It's not that I don't want my students to practice. Instead, we hold activities that encourage practice for a specific event. For example, we are in our fifth year offering the Fiddle-a-thon, which gives prizes for different types of practice. For example, for first graders or younger, we give awards to the students who played "Boil The Cabbage Down" most often or practiced for the most minutes during the month.

I don't like to use the word "practice." Just ask your kid to play a song for you.

**Chad:** It's true for many of my adult students, too. There's one who has been taking lessons for a long time. When she started, she told me she was swamped and not going to have time to practice, but loves lessons. I told her that was fine. Her pace is slow, but over the years, she has gotten a lot better. She sees that.

We both try not to push but instead create opportunities to play, whether playing as a group at square dances, or the student concert at the Freight & Salvage in Berkeley, busking at the San Francisco

*"I don't like to use the word practice. Just ask your kid to play a song for you."*

– Catherine Manning



A Manning Music annual student concert. Photo by Mike Melnyk.



The arc of each student is different, but I like to see where they go. For some, music is just for fun; for others, it becomes their profession.

– Catherine Manning



Catherine, Jasper, and Chad Manning and students outside of San Francisco Ferry Building. Photo by Manning Music.

Farmers Market, or playing at retirement centers fundraisers – having the opportunity to play is what matters.

**Maggie:** How would you advise people to find a good music teacher if they don't know one?

**Chad:** If you don't have anyone in your area, going to festivals and asking around is helpful. Of course, nowadays with Zoom and video, it's easier. During the pandemic, I had several students move away, and they couldn't find local teachers, so they're continuing their lessons with me on Zoom. There are online opportunities at places like Peghead Nation, where I also teach classes.

**Maggie:** Tell me about your summer music camp. How is it different from other music camps?

**Chad:** Manning Music Summer Camp is just for kids, and young musicians do much of the teaching. Our camp teachers – all under 20 – Tessa Schwartz, Jasper Manning, Lucy Khadder, Sophia Sparks, and other young musicians, lead the camp.

It's for all levels of young musicians who play fiddle, mandolin, guitar, bass, banjo, or Dobro. We also train some younger students to run the camp and teach. There's no better way to learn a song than to teach it.

**Maggie:** What's ahead for your business?

**Catherine:** It's funny – I don't like to call it a business. It's all been so organic. You could say it's grown fast but feels slow because everything was natural. The only time we advertised was in the beginning, before Manning Music was a business, and we were looking for students in the East Bay. We had flyers and put them up at coffee shops; after that, it was word of mouth.

**Chad:** Friends invited their friends – we didn't do a massive advertising push. We still don't even have a "real" website – that's on purpose. We like the "underground" feeling. We just get to know people, and that's led to this amazing community.

**Catherine:** It is an amazing community.

**Chad:** Stash Wyslouch, one of our instructors, recently told me, "I've taught music in a lot of places, and I've never seen this many teachers excited to teach." Then he asked me, "How do you have so many good people in this community?"

It's because it is a community. There are hundreds of wonderful people involved.

**Catherine:** For Manning Music, we go one step at a time. We just think of whatever the next thing is and do what feels right in the moment.



Farmer's market busking. Photo by Manning Music.

Re-learned a tune you forgot	Played something 3 times in a row	Played in a key other than G, D, or A	Played a 2 octave scale	Played a waltz
Practiced for a whole hour	Played something with longbows	Worked on pitch	Play a Celtic tune 3 times in a row	Learned a new bowing
Worked on left hand technique	Played an arpeggio		Listened to a tune by John Lusk	Played in a minor key
Played a song about an animal	Played in third position	Learned a variation	Played something with doublestops	Played for a friend or family member
Learned a kickoff or tag	Played your fiddle outside	Practiced with a backup track	Played a song with more than two parts	Learned a new tune

B	I	N	G	O
Played your fiddle for 30 minutes	Played something with long bows	Played a whole tune making sure your fingers are right on your tapes. (Notes are IN TUNE!)	Played Boil The Cabbage starting on your 2nd finger on the D string	Played a tune in each room of your house
Watch a video or listen to a song played by Black Violin	Played your fiddle outside		Listened to a tune by John Lusk	Played your fiddle for 30 minutes
Play one of your tunes walking or dancing through your house	Make video of yourself performing a tune and send it to a family member	Played one of your songs with your eyes closed	Listen to a recording of a new tune that you want to learn at least 5 times	Played for a friend or family member
Teach a friend or family member how to hold the bow	Sang Old Joe Clark	Played something three times in a row	Played Boil The Cabbage down slow and sleepy	Played something with short bows

Re-learned a tune you forgot	Played something 3 times in a row	Played in a key other than G, D, or A	Played a tune with correct down and up strokes	Played a waltz
Practiced for a whole hour	Played a tune with more than two parts	Played a pentatonic scale	Played a Bluegrass tune 3 times in a row	Listened to a Mandolin solo recorded before 1970
Worked on right hand technique	Played an arpeggio		Listened to a Bill Monroe solo	Played in a minor key
Played a song about an animal	Played in capo position	Played a Bluegrass lick	Played something with doublestops	Played for a friend or family member
Learned a kickoff or tag	Played your mandolin outside	Practiced with a backup track	Played an alternating string exercise scale	Learned a new tune

Fiddle and mandolin summer practice bingo. Images courtesy Manning Music.



# WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

## INSTRUMENTS OF BLUEGRASS

By Jack Tuttle and the Bluegrass Breakdown

One of the most important decisions in learning bluegrass and old-time music isn't just figuring out what the heck they are or are not, but what instrument is right for you. They each have a personality of their own, and getting that instrument match right can be tough.

The truth is that many of us are called to particular instruments when we start listening: the rolling syncopation of the three-finger Scruggs style, or the talking-drum funk of the fretless clawhammer banjo; the chirp of the mandolin; the grounded zen one-two of the bass.

Learning an instrument at an early age is shown to improve memory, language, and reasoning skills. It improves academic performance in areas such as science, reading, and math. It improves young folks' capacity for empathy, communication, and teamwork. It calms anxiety, and improves emotional regulation and healthy emotional expression. We have the receipts to prove it!

It's a great time to be a music student. Zoom, YouTube, music streaming, and platforms like CBA's Online Youth Academy make finding musical inspiration and learning the foundations and mechanics of music easier than ever. Also, as the restrictions of the pandemic fade, and getting together for things like music lessons and public jam become normal, that sense of community that comes from enjoying the performance of this music together is accessible once again.

When choosing an instrument, it's helpful to remember that each instrument plays a distinct role to achieve the distinctive sounds found in our music.

We looked to Bay-Area "instructor's-instructor" Jack Tuttle to help explain those roles for the bluegrass player, filling in some of the gaps for folks drawn to the slightly different sound of what we've come to think of as the archetypal old-time string band: closely-paired fiddle and, often, open-back banjo played in a frailing, or clawhammer, style.



Banjo March at 2013 Music Camp. CBA file photo.

### BANJO

The banjo is known for its steady stream of rapid-fire notes providing much of the "drive" in bluegrass and old-time melodies, especially on the fast pieces. It often bridges the melody and rhythm in old-time settings. Notice the use of open strings and surrounding melody notes with left-hand hammer-ons, slides and pull-offs in both clawhammer and three-finger styles. Syncopation is very common. Backup is often played in a similar style to the lead to impart drive, but sometimes uses instead a vamping pattern employing closed chords with a percussive chop on the 2nd and 4th beats of a measure. Old-time players use a variety of galloping clawhammer frailing techniques or left-hand muting on the backbeat to backup singers and often follow the fiddle on tunes. Bluegrass banjo relentlessly puts fills at the end of vocal lines when there is space, and also plays lots of up-the-neck licks, usually based on those by Earl Scruggs. Banjo has a unique role in bluegrass as an almost ever-present backup instrument. Even when it is playing quieter back-up, one can usually hear fill licks. Similarly, the banjo is present playing the melody in the bass octave on clawhammer banjo in an old-time ensemble. Check out Fred Cockerham and Tommy Jarrell's collaborations for examples of old-time clawhammer ensemble playing.

#### Jack's Banjo Tips

*Some banjo players over play, playing too much or too loud, but beginners usually play too little, failing to impart the necessary drive or taking up enough fills.*

### MANDOLIN

The mandolin is mostly, but not exclusively, considered a bluegrass instrument. Solos often display lots of blues influence. Sometimes leads are played in a closed chord position, similar to a banjo roll. Repetitive notes are often played, changing on the offbeat. Tremolo is commonly used on slow pieces. Chop chords on the 2nd and 4th, called the backbeat, are used during backup, or on beats 2 and 3 in a waltz, with an occasional extra upstroke hitting just ahead of the offbeat. The mandolin sometimes fills in the vocal holes on fast songs, and even occasionally plays right over the singing. On slow numbers, the mandolin becomes a bit more prominent when actively backing up, filling vocal holes or playing tremolo behind the singer. Most fundamental bluegrass ideas on the instrument are attributed to Bill Monroe's playing.

#### Jack's Mandolin Tips

*Some mandolin players over play the rhythm, strumming too often. Also, some mandolin players fill too much.*



Marty Varner on mandolin at 2006 FDF. CBA file photo.





Jan Purat and AJ Lee. Photo by Robin Frenette.

## FIDDLE

Bluegrass fiddle solos are a mix of double-stops, slides and very fast single noting. Traditionally, solos follow the melody of a song for the first three lines, with lots of blues infused, and then improvisationally depart from the melody on the last line. Kenny Baker and Stuart Duncan are icons in bluegrass fiddling; old-time fiddling is often characterized by regional distinctions, and the pantheon of renown players in the 20th century numbers in the dozens. The recording *Classic Old Time Fiddle* from Smithsonian Folkways reveals a glimpse of this rich canon.

Players fill actively in the vocal spaces at times, usually playing blues-based licks. The fiddle may also play right under the vocals, adding a subtle texture, usually on the lower strings, but occasionally up high. Often a fiddle will vamp right with the mandolin, either while holding a double stop or sometimes just hitting muted strings with the bow for a percussive sound. Sometimes, appropriately, the fiddle will disappear entirely.

Old-time fiddle often finds itself paired with the banjo for melodies in the high register (or top two strings), then moving to the lower register (often on the bottom two strings) and playing more quietly behind any vocals. Tim O'Brien's work here is flawless.

### Jack's Fiddle Tips

*Playing too much, or too loud, or phrasing too much with the melody, or playing the melody along with the singer, any of which can annoy the singer. Playing chops along with the mandolin can result in "flam" where the two instruments are slightly out of sync with each other.*

## GUITAR

Guitar solos are optional – and were not regularly done until the 1960's, and even then, only in bluegrass and blues (not old-time, where the guitar plays an exclusively rhythm role). Rhythm playing features bass runs and fills, with bluegrass players, especially, playing fills, like the famous "G run," at every opportunity. Dynamic strumming as aggressive swells at the end of the lines contrasts with quiet normal strumming. Some players use highly syncopated bass runs. Some players use lots of bass runs while others are more sparing. Check out Riley Puckett of the Skillet Lickers for some of the foundational bass run ideas still explored today by both bluegrass and old-time players. Tony Rice has been the major influence since the 70's for bluegrassers.

### Jack's Guitar Tips

*The most-common problem is over-strumming, resulting in a thick, thrashing sound that obscures the other instruments and vocals. Also, many beginners don't use enough dynamics or enough variety in their strumming patterns. Often bass runs are not thick enough.*

## DOBRO

This is the least common bluegrass instrument. Dobro backup plays bluesy fill licks on slow songs with lots of slides. On faster songs, it tends to play more punctuated lines. Dobro players often vamp on the off-beat similar to the mandolin, or can just be silent. Josh Graves was the only guy for awhile, but in the 1970's Jerry Douglas became the man.

### Jack's Dobro Tips

*Problems include playing too many fills, thus squeezing out equal chances for other instruments to fill.*



A young Helen Foley performs on Dobro at 2012 Fathers Day Festival as part of Kids on Bluegrass. CBA file photo.



Megan January on bass. Photo by Robin Frenette.

## BASS

A good groove for bluegrass usually requires fairly simple bass lines – root, 5th alternating on downbeats. Rock steady timing is the key for good bass playing. Cedric Rainwater has been anointed "the great one," but, in reality, this has much to do with his being in the original 1945 bluegrass band with Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, and Chubby Wise. Long-time Nashville Bluegrass Band bass player and SoCal native Gene Libbea notes that the bass groove is as much about where the bass notes stop as where they start – notice that too many bass players mute the bass note just as the "chuck" of the guitar strum, and banjo or mando chop, happen on the backbeat.

Bass runs connect one chord to another and are used on successive beats. Walking bass lines, where the bass plays on each beat using mostly arpeggios, scales, or chromatic passages, is used for bouncy numbers with a swing feel, or to change the feel of a song, often during instrumental breaks. On a waltz, the bass normally would play only on the first beat of the measure, except during bass runs, but may play an additional offbeat note just ahead of that beat, on the third beat of the previous measure.

### Jack's Bass Tips

*Common problems include playing out of time, out of tune, or not getting good tone. It's not usually a problem to play simple 1-5 lines, but good bass runs tastefully played can subtly add interest.*



# HAZEL HOUSER SPENCER

## THE CENTRAL VALLEY'S BIGGEST NAME YOU'VE NEVER HEARD



Hazel Houser Spencer. Handout photo.

By Stella Beralis

**H**azel Houser Spencer, a Modesto resident for decades until her passing in 1996, was a lyricist and composer of many country and gospel songs of renown. Her name first came to my attention when I started obsessively listening to the Louvin Brothers – I noted that many of their most interesting songs were written by someone named H. Houser.

After some cursory digging, I learned that the songwriter listed as “H. Houser” was Hazel Houser, a songwriter from Modesto – the same Central Valley city where I grew up, and in which I now live and work as a librarian, poet, and mother. As I began researching her life, I noticed a dearth of information on her, despite the fact that she penned key songs in the country gospel and bluegrass pantheon.

*Her work as a songwriter and musician took place while Hazel was raising her children, sewing her own costumes, canning peaches and other produce, and doing all the other stuff of life that defined a mother's existence in the 50s.*

Born Hazel Marie Ollar on June 3, 1922 in Heavener, Okla., Hazel was one of six children in a family whose father was a traveling Baptist preacher who encouraged gospel singing in the home. Along with her siblings, Hazel learned to sing and play instruments from an early age.

Like so many others, the Ollar family arrived in California after the Great Depression in pursuit of work, when Hazel was 8 years old. She wrote her first song at 12. Hazel later married and had three children: Gerrie, Charlotte, and Doug. As a married woman and mother of three, Hazel continued to write songs, sing, and play guitar and piano just as she had growing up.

In 1952, when Hazel was 30 years old, her Uncle Grady asked her to tape some of her songs for him. Hazel was working at Modesto radio station KTRB, which was just across the street from the Houser home. There, she became acquainted with Chester Smith, a KTRB radio personality and musician who had been performing on-air since he was a child. In 1953, Smith was signed to Capitol Records. He brought the Hazel-penned song “Wait a Little Longer Please Jesus” to Ken Nelson at Capitol, who promptly signed Hazel to an exclusive songwriter's contract.

Since its 1954 release, “Wait a Little Longer Please Jesus” has been recorded by dozens of artists, including Bill Monroe, Rose Maddox, Porter Wagoner, Bonnie Owens & Merle Haggard, and Del McCoury. In addition to “Wait a Little Longer Please Jesus,” Hazel and Chester recorded “Men Are So Busy,” “He Will Calm the Troubled Waters,” “Bend Down,” “I’m Going to Serve Him,” “Praying,” “I’m Ready to Go Home,” and “River of Jordan.”

Hazel began to make a local name for herself, both through her publishing contract with Central Songs as well as through her performing with Smith. As Smith's band dynamic shifted, Ray Park, who also played in Smith's band, asked Hazel to be in his band. The Parks and Housers were good friends, recorded



Hazel Houser Spencer with Chester Smith (2nd from left). Handout photo.





KTRB radio's Chester Smith recorded "Wait a Little Longer Please Jesus" with Hazel in 1954. Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Quartet released their version of the song a few months later, in early 1955.

together, and spent time at each other's homes, their children playing together.

Newspapers from the mid-to-late 1950s document that Hazel played in Chester Smith's Capitol Recording Band for countless shows as well as alongside and as a member of Ray Park's band. Often, her children accompanied her and sang harmony at her gigs. Her work as a songwriter and musician took place while Hazel was raising her children, sewing her own costumes, canning peaches and other produce, and doing all the

other stuff of life that defined a mother's existence in the 50s.

In 1959, at the same time that Vern Williams and Ray Park began playing together, one of Hazel's songs, "My Baby's Gone," written after the passing of her beloved Uncle Grady, won her a BMI achievement award. The 1958 single recording of that song by the Louvin Brothers was a hit; they even titled their 1960 hit album after the song. Artists who went on to record "My Baby's Gone" are among the greats of country and gospel music: Roy Clark, Glen Campbell, Ray Price, The Johnny Mann Singers, Jim Ed Brown & the Browns, Wanda Jackson, Charlie Louvin & Melba Montgomery, Dottie West, Jody Miller, Jeanne Black, and many others..

Although "My Baby's Gone" was notably one of the few secular songs Hazel published, the religious music angle that Hazel brought to the songwriting endeavor was present in Vern and Ray's own body of work, too. Indeed, much later, Vern and Ray recorded Hazel's composition, "The Touch of God's Hand," for their 1974 album *Sounds from the Ozarks*.



Ray Park and Vern Williams. From the cover of the LP "Sounds From the Ozarks" by Vern and Ray, "Old Homestead West." CBA file photo.

*Since its 1954 release, "Wait a Little Longer Please Jesus" has been recorded by dozens of artists, including Bill Monroe, Rose Maddox, Porter Wagoner, Bonnie Owens & Merle Haggard, and Del McCoury.*

While living a grounded life as a Modesto matriarch raising three children, Hazel was on a first-name basis with Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Minnie Pearl, and other country stars of the 50s who clearly recognized her as an irrefutable songwriting talent, sought out her opinions on song matters, and respected her. Minnie Pearl brought her backstage to talk about sewing. Hazel chewed out Buck Owens over the phone when he was recording "My Mother's Prayers," for his tendency to change song lyrics.

Even as late as 1994, a few years before Hazel passed away, she was acknowledged as a foremother of Central Valley country music. Her son Doug relates an anecdote about the entire family attending an open-air Boy Howdy concert at Hughson High School in 1994. Boy Howdy, a country band which gained popularity in the 90s, was led by Ray Park's sons, Cary and Larry Park.

Naturally the Housers – Hazel, Gerrie, and Doug – were in attendance. Gerrie went to the backstage tent door and asked the security guard to inform the band of her mother's presence at the concert. Shortly after, the Park boys came out; Hazel and Gerrie were taken backstage to talk it up with the Parks.

A bit later, during the concert, the Park brothers gave Hazel a shoutout from onstage. One of the brothers also ribbed the other about the time he accidentally let Hazel's trained jackrabbit escape from its cage when they were kids: "You're lucky she still wants to see you," he joked. The entire audience learned about Hazel Houser's connection to the Park family that day.

So, even decades after her commercial songwriting achievements, she was being recognized by Central Valley musicians and songwriters whom she influenced. What a beautiful, full-circle night that must have been.

Although her own work was firmly rooted in country gospel, Hazel worked at an interesting nexus of religious music, the Bakersfield country sound, hillbilly music, rockabilly, and the birth of West Coast bluegrass – not to mention the widening cultural impact of rock & roll. Her songs were hits in countries across the world, and even today Hazel's songs are widely performed by bluegrass, country, and rockabilly bands.

A working-class mother, musician, and songwriter whose lyrical poetry made an impact on people across the globe, Hazel Houser Spencer is a Central Valley musical ancestor who reminds us of the richness of the art that comes from our soil – and its influence on a much wider stage. Let's get to know her name.

*Special thanks to Doug Houser and Gerrie Bell for their contributions to this story.*





# CBA'S ONLINE BLUEGRASS ACADEMY

A FAMILY-FRIENDLY PLATFORM FOR NEW LEARNERS, WITH ROOM TO GROW

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

Recognizing that kids can't always make it in-person to the Father's Day Festival to get immersed in bluegrass music, last year CBA launched a wonderful online alternative for aspiring young musicians. The CBA Online Bluegrass Academy is targeted at kids six and older who want to learn to play any of several bluegrass and old-time instruments with the guidance of some of our finest musicians and most accessible teachers. What's more, the program comes with a seven-day free trial that makes it risk free explore.

To see for yourself, start from the link to Bluegrass Academy from the CBA webpage (or through the QR code at the end of this story); you'll be directed to the academy page on truefire.com for a simple registration process – that doesn't require you to enter a credit card. Hallelujah!

**"At a fraction of the cost of a single one-on-one lesson, the monthly subscription of \$6 per month is a tremendous value for the beginner."**

Truefire is a tremendously powerful music education platform in its own right, with its biggest criticism often being that the scale of its content – currently at 50,000+ instructional videos and growing – overwhelms the newcomer. CBA's Online Bluegrass Academy eliminates this problem by providing easy-to-follow, foundational instruction on the most common bluegrass and old-time instruments plus ukulele (regarded as one of the most accessible string instruments to people of all ages).

The Online Bluegrass Academy allows almost anyone to learn the basics of each instrument with videos and audio featuring inspiring and encouraging instructors. Each session is backed up with solid, commonly-used learning tools like vocal lead sheets with words and backup chords, and a helpful key to the Nashville numbering system musicians use to talk about chords in many genres of music today. And the videos are fun; CBA has recruited renowned professional instructors to provide fun, kid-friendly lessons.

The platform also includes a jamming section – 44 video performances of bluegrass and old-time festival campground favorites in simple arrangements and accessible tempos to get your chops together, and a songbook with resources to learn versions of classics from California and beyond, including the likes of Tony Rice, Kathy Kallick, Bill Monroe, The Stanley Brothers, Jimmy Martin, and The Kentucky Colonels.

It's clear that the current iteration of the online academy is a point-of-departure, not a completed, highly-refined product. Some of the jam links don't have play-along videos ... yet. Tablature for a few tunes have yet to be posted. And those familiar with some of the latest learning platforms might find the current iteration of the Online Academy a bit basic; some of the newer technology TrueFire offers elsewhere on the platform is underutilized here, like the ability to link videos and notation or tab in real-time, with adjustable tempo control through Soundslice.

Regardless, at a fraction of the cost of a single one-on-one lesson, the monthly subscription of \$6 per month is a tremendous value for the beginner – as the platform's many current users will gladly testify. Users may even choose to fund youth

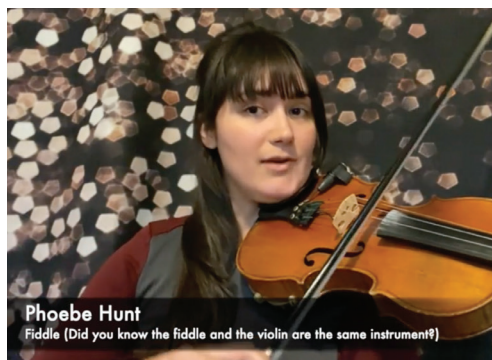


scholarships to the platform at a \$20 per month subscription. It's also clear that, with increased usage and the compounding contributions of many musicians and technology mavens to bring the Online Bluegrass Academy to its full potential, this valuable asset in the CBA youth-friendly instruction portfolio will only provide more and more benefit to developing musicians – and growing our bluegrass community for generations to come.

In addition to serving as the Breakdown's managing editor, Jason recently spearheaded the initial phase of development of Junior Appalachian Musicians, Inc.'s (jam-kids.org) first digital learning platform Fresh off this experience, he offered a review of our online academy for this youth issue of the Breakdown.



Tristan Scroggins  
Mandolin



Phoebe Hunt  
Fiddle (Did you know the fiddle and the violin are the same instrument?)



Cathy Fink  
Clawhammer Banjo (Multiple GRAMMY Award Winner)

Screenshots from Online Bluegrass Academy.



JUNE 15-18, 2023 | 48TH ANNUAL

# FATHER'S DAY

## BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

NEVADA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS, GRASS VALLEY, CA | FATHERSDAYFESTIVAL.COM



### MAIN STAGE

Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway  
Rhonda Vincent & the Rage  
Blue Highway | Mile Twelve | Jake Blount  
Allison de Groot & Tatiana Hargreaves  
The Kody Norris Show  
Seth Mulder & Midnight Run  
Never Come Down | East Nash Grass

### CALIFORNIA SHOWCASE BANDS

Clinton Davis String Band | Hot October | Water Tower Band  
Matt & George and their Pleasant Valley Boys | West 45  
**MORE BANDS TO BE ANNOUNCED!**

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT FATHERSDAYFESTIVAL.COM



Visiting with instrument vendors. Photo by Bob Free.



Campground jam. Photo by Alan Bond.

Check out our photo albums from previous Father's Day Festivals, with lots of great memories captured by our excellent photographers!



## CBA FOUNDER'S CELEBRATION: CARL PAGTER REMEMBRANCE

**SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2023 - FAIRFIELD, CA**

FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER  
1000 Kentucky Street, Fairfield, CA

12:00-5:00 PM - Free Jam in the Park  
5:00-6:30 PM - Dinner, Stories & Music  
6:45-10:00 PM - Concert



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# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

Please share questions, suggestions, or story ideas at [breakdown@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:breakdown@californiabluegrass.net)



YOUTH  
ISSUE  
May 2023



## CELEBRATING CBA YOUTH

### VOLUNTEER AT FATHER'S DAY FESTIVAL!



Volunteers are the heart of Father's Day Festival! Meet great people, have fun, and contribute to one of the best festival experiences in the West! For more information on volunteering follow the QR code or send us an email: [volunteers@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:volunteers@californiabluegrass.net)



Photo by Robin Frenette.

### WHO IS MAKING INSTRUMENTS YOU LOVE?

LET US KNOW AT  
[BREAKDOWN@CALIFORNIABLUEGRASS.NET](mailto:breakdown@californiabluegrass.net)

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### Monthly Trivia Quiz

by Bert Daniel

Our March question asked: "Name the Central Valley songwriter who kept a low profile but was on a first-name basis with the likes of Merle Haggard, Rose Maddox, Ray Park, Porter Wagoner and Minnie Pearl. She was a housewife who ran a driving school, but the Louvin Brothers covered at least four of her songs."

There were fourteen respondents for the March trivia question with the correct answer: Hazel Houser Spencer. **We have a great article on her inside this Breakdown, don't miss it!**

CBA Members David Brown, John Drake, Richard Evans, Jack Frost, Lorie Frost, John Gwinner, Bob Hoffman, Mike Howard, Louis Kaplan, Joel Keebler, S. Lesovsky, Joe Ross, Mary Wonderly and Luke Wukmer guessed correctly; the winner of the prize lottery is Joe Ross.



Hazel Houser Spencer. Handout photo.

### MAY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

This month, we want to know the name of the California bluegrass musician who recorded background music on his chief instrument for a popular long running TV series, but did not do the theme song for that same show.

Send answers to:  
[trivia@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:trivia@californiabluegrass.net)  
no later than May 31.

This month's prize is a Paige guitar or banjo capo. Only CBA members are eligible to win; if there is more than one correct response, the prize winner will be selected by random drawing. The winner will be announced in the July 2023 Bluegrass Breakdown.

