



# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

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



GLOBAL  
CONNECTIONS

Sept. 2023

## CBA PROMOTES INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AT IBMA

BLUEGRASS INDUSTRY CONFERENCE ATTRACTS BIG NAMES, GLOBAL LEADERS, AND BLUEGRASS FANS

By The Bluegrass Breakdown

By the time the COVID pandemic swept the country in 2020, effectively crushing the hopes of public gatherings, the CBA's presence at the International Bluegrass Music Association's annual fall conference had become, well, legendary. As the World of Bluegrass reconvenes – literally and figuratively – in Raleigh, N.C., this September, attendees at one of the best bluegrass events in the world might notice that as the CBA approaches 50 years, its presence at IBMA is changing – just as the event itself has since its early days in Owensboro and Louisville, Ky., more than 20 years ago.

"CBA is at the center of a lot of important things during IBMA – the Kids on Bluegrass program for example. The CBA suite itself is a hub of great music, of course, but it's also kind of home base for Bluegrass Pride," then IBMA board member and honorary Californian Jeremy Darrow told Dave Berry for Bluegrass today in early 2019. "Finding yourself in there for the first time you can feel like a party-crasher, but the sense of fun and openness is immediately apparent. It's one of my favorite places to hang during IBMA."

In 2023, everything has changed. California bluegrass is no longer an outpost in the community, as Molly Tuttle's Grammy award shows. Today, CBA's focus is shifting into deepening relationships with global bluegrass leadership in programs like IBMA's "Leadership Bluegrass" professional development program to help promote bluegrass's success and longevity in California and beyond.

"We're going to be doing a lot more behind the scenes," said Lani Way, who helps organize the IBMA Momentum Awards, and coordinates CBA's sponsorship of the IBMA Industry awards, "which show how we play a role supporting up-and-coming artists and the hardworking professionals supporting music as designers, writers, broadcasters, and so on."

Another area of focus for CBA on the international stage is promoting youth involvement in bluegrass. IBMA's Kids on Bluegrass is built on CBA's program of the same name created by Frank Solivan Sr., now led by President Emerita Darby Brandli and 2022 IBMA Mentor of the Year Kimber Ludiker, who met



at Leadership Bluegrass. The program model is now being used by festivals in Europe, including 2023 IBMA Event of the Year nominee, the La Roche Bluegrass Festival.

"Don't let all of this make you think CBA isn't going to throw any more great hospitality events. Look for celebrations at IBMA

*cont'd on page 6 →*

## ADVICE FOR TRAVELING PICKERS

By Miles Quale, Crying Uncle Bluegrass Band, for The Bluegrass Breakdown

Aside from the camaraderie and the musical joy you can feel as part of a band, you generally need to be an official member to have the chance to play gigs. If you are lucky enough, your band may start touring nationally. With just a little more planning, the band can even travel internationally. My band, Crying Uncle, isn't yet touring full-time, but we have been fortunate enough to tour and perform in Europe and Asia. We've even played on cruise

ships a couple of times. I've also recently returned home from traveling abroad for eight months. Here are a few things that I've learned along the way.

When flying anywhere, the first rule is to never check your instrument as baggage. Yes, some musicians have special cases and don't think twice about checking their axe, but for most of us, it's all about being the first to get on and find an overhead bin to avoid your instrument being crushed in the cargo hold or subject to any accident. If it comes to the point that you have to check your instrument, try to stuff a t-shirt in your case to minimize the amount it moves around during the ride.

Flying around the U.S., we've been really happy with Southwest and Delta. Internationally, things can be a bit tricky. We've flown the new Norwegian budget carrier, Norse Air, a few times, and they've been great with our instruments – fiddle, mandolin, and guitar. We've flown on Air Italia, Air France, and RyanAir, and we've always had good experiences with carrying on our instruments. We sometimes have to pay a small fee, but that is not the norm. On the other hand, we flew



Crying Uncle at La Roche. Photo by Emmanuel Marin.

## CBA'S LEADERSHIP HELPS FORGE GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

By Maggie Sokolik, CBA Global Connections Director

Welcome to our September issue, which looks at bluegrass and its influences outside of the U.S. As the director of the Global Connections initiative within the CBA, and as someone who has worked for over 30 years in international education and diplomacy, I am interested in bluegrass as one way to connect cultures.

Although deeply rooted in American cultural heritage, bluegrass has crossed geographical borders to find a home in many countries. And even though it is an American style of music, we know that bluegrass draws its influences from various traditions, including English, Scottish, Irish, African, and African American. Bluegrass's collaborative style, authentic lyrics, and skilled instrumental breaks have resonated with people of different

*cont'd on page 3 →*

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# DISCOVERING TONY RICE ... WITH YOUR HELP!

By Bill Amatneek for The Bluegrass Breakdown

*Tony Rice has certainly been one of the musicians who has helped bluegrass win audiences around the world – including as part of the original, California-based David Grisman Quintet. Bill Amatneek was there at the beginning. And while he has plenty of great stories about Tony, we really get to know the person behind the late, great guitar player and singer through the eyes of his friends and family. And so, Bill has a special request of our readers, so please, read on. – BB*

I started putting together an oral biography of bluegrass guitar legend Tony Rice in early 2021, a few months after he passed. It now contains interviews with Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck, Peter Rowan, Mark Schatz, luthier Harry Sparks, Tony's brother, Ron, and his uncle, Frank Poindexter, as well as input from many others. Many people shared their photos of Tony, and now over 35 color and black-and-white images, most of them never seen before, adorn the book's interior.

I played bass with Tony in the group that recorded the original David Grisman Quintet album. As a minister in the Universal Life Church, I married him to his second wife, Leela, the love of his life, and played string bass with Rowan & Rice at the second Freight & Salvage.

Tony and I played music together for uncounted hours in the DGQ, drove hundreds of miles shoulder-to-shoulder in a Mercury station wagon, toked bud, broke bread and swilled coffee together, shared laughs, stories, and dressing rooms, many times.

I thought I knew him. But I didn't.

I only began discovering Tony Rice as I started listening to the stories his oldest musician friends and family told me. Here is just one:

Frank Poindexter, Tony's uncle on his mother's side, who knew Tony all his life, told me this story about Tony's skill with repairing Bulova Accutron watches.

"Tony's passion for those Accutron watches

kept him alive for several years. You know he always loved those Accutron Spaceview watches. It got to the point he said, "I don't know how these damn things work, but I'm gonna find out.

"Tony, he got with this retired Bulova engineer, and he learned everything he could from him. He got the microscope, he got the tools, he got the parts. Tony could take one down to the chassis, every single part. Tony rebuilt hundreds – I'm talking literally hundreds – of watches, for himself and other musicians and fans and friends.

"He would go and do a session for somebody and rather than get paid in cash he'd say, 'You got any old Accutrons?'

"They gave him Accutron watches for parts and stuff like that. Tony is a perfectionist when it comes to doing something like that. I've got a box full of Accutrons that he rebuilt for me."

I've got dozens of stories about Tony, but I need more.

Did you know him, meet him, hang out with him, play music with him? I would love to hear about it. What did he say and do? Did you learn something from him; did you learn about him?

Please write it down, go to VineyardsPress.com, click on Contact, fill in the blanks and send it on over. I'm looking forward to reading your story.



Tony Rice. Photo by Bill Amatneek.

## BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

September 2023 · Global Connections

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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Scan the code and  
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Rice story!



Nightly concerts. Photo by Robin Frenette.



No shortage of jamming! Photo by David Cupp.

**November 2-5 in Carlsbad, CA**

**24-hour jamming event - free concerts,  
workshops, and kids activities!**

**CBA Rate rooms are now sold out, but lots of options are available to join us for the event! Reserve a room at Carlsbad-by-the-Sea at market rate, stay at a nearby hotel, or join us for the day if you're local! We look forward to another great event.**





## GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

cont'd from front page

cultures, leading to a global bluegrass movement.

In the late 20th century and into this century, international bluegrass festivals have also grown in popularity. From La Roche in the French Alps to the European World of Bluegrass in the Netherlands to the Takarakuza Bluegrass Festival in Japan, bluegrass fans and musicians can participate in bluegrass culture. These festivals provide a platform for global musicians to showcase their interpretations of the genre, blending their own cultural influences. From Japan to Czechia, from Australia to Eswatini, Africa, bluegrass communities have formed, celebrating the music's authenticity and spirit.

The beauty of bluegrass lies in its ability to embrace cultural diversity while preserving the music's essence. As musicians from various nations adopt the genre, they incorporate their local musical elements, enriching the bluegrass sound and catalog. Sometimes these influences come back to the U.S., and we see different "nontraditional" instruments incorporated into the genre. For example, if you go to YouTube and search for "bluegrass oud," you will find the incorporation of the ancient acoustic instrument from the Middle East used in bluegrass music. It's a beautiful match.

The internet and social media also play important roles in connecting bluegrass fans worldwide. Musicians now collaborate across continents, as witnessed in CBA's 2021 Jam-a-Thon, which featured artists from 12 different countries, including India, South Korea, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Spain, and more, and had audience members from at least 18 different countries. Online video platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and TikTok allow fans to appreciate classic recordings, discover new artists, and connect with other fans, fostering a global community centered around bluegrass music.

The CBA would like to further connect with our global community by partnering with festivals or producers throughout the world. We have several partnerships in Europe, and would like to establish more in Asia, South America, Australia and New Zealand, or wherever bluegrass is found. Look for the Global Connections page on the CBA website to learn more about how we can help promote your festival or events.



# CELEBRATING CARL PAGTER CBA MEMBER NUMBER ONE

By The Bluegrass Breakdown. Photos by Alan Bond.



Corbin Pagter and a beautifully curated Carl Pagter memorial display.



Dave Earl shows off Country Ham albums.

This past July 22, over 150 dedicated CBA members braved the 107-degree heat in Fairfield, California to attend CBA's "Founder's Celebration". The event memorialized CBA co-founder Carl Pagter, who passed away earlier this year. The Community Center was comfortably air-conditioned, but conversations were warm and the music hot. Attendees enjoyed a delicious dinner, lots of reminiscing about CBA's nearly 50-year history, and – of course – lots of jamming. Performers included Corbin Pagter and friends, Ed Neff and Blue & Lonesome, a stunning reunion of the Good Ol' Persons, and the Caleb Klauder & Reeb Willms Bluegrass band. Special thanks to Steve Hogle, who made it all happen.



Ed Neff and Katya Tucker.



Carl's famous hat.



Good Ol' Persons Reunion.



100 degrees outside! Keeping cool with indoor jams.





A group of jammers on the streets at the Al Ras Bluegrass Festival 2022.



The Oriol Saña Trio onstage at Al Ras Bluegrass Festival 2022.

# AL RAS: 22 YEARS OF OPEN-AIR BLUEGRASS IN SPAIN FESTIVAL INFLUENCED BY CBA'S KIDS ON BLUEGRASS

By Michael Luchtan for The Bluegrass Breakdown

The Al Ras festival, now in its 22nd year, happens on the first weekend of November, usually beginning Wednesday and stretching for four days. It started many years ago when a few friends who liked bluegrass met at a park outside of Barcelona to play music in the open air – “al ras,” in Catalan. Events like concerts and jams tend to creep in on either side of the festival, but in general the festival will start with concerts in Barcelona on Thursday and Friday nights, the big festival night on Saturday in the old market of Mollet, a small town just outside of Barcelona, and a jam or concert during the day on Sunday.

Along with showcasing our local bands, the main purpose of the festival is to expose local musicians to bluegrass groups from outside the community. There is a predictable hierarchy: local bands, European bands, and bands from the U.S. Every year we try to bring a band over from the States, but this has been difficult since COVID.

We survived the pandemic with an online festival in 2020, and in 2021 and 2022 we only had local bands. This year we are back to hosting European bands for the event, and next year we hope to have a good American band once again – any California bands interested?

The year before COVID, back in 2019, we had Jeff Scroggins and his back up band of crack musicians, many of whom, like Yoseff Tucker and Scott Gates, grew up in the California bluegrass scene.

This year, the festival will predominantly feature local bands but will also highlight two European-based acts. The Bib Ramblers, featuring award-winning fiddler Mitch Depew, is coming from the other side of Spain to cater to an ever-growing old-time constituency. Mitch has been an essential part of the Barcelona Bluegrass Camp for years. Additionally, the Italian band Red Wine, who just received the 2023 Distinguished Achievement Award from the IBMA and is touring California soon, will play the festival.

The local band Newgrass Republic, featuring lead singer Tony Jou Itarte, will play for the first time since 2018. The Al Ras House band, fronted by Josep Ponsa (aka Joe Fields) will front the Al Ras house band. Joe Fields won the Texas balladeer of the

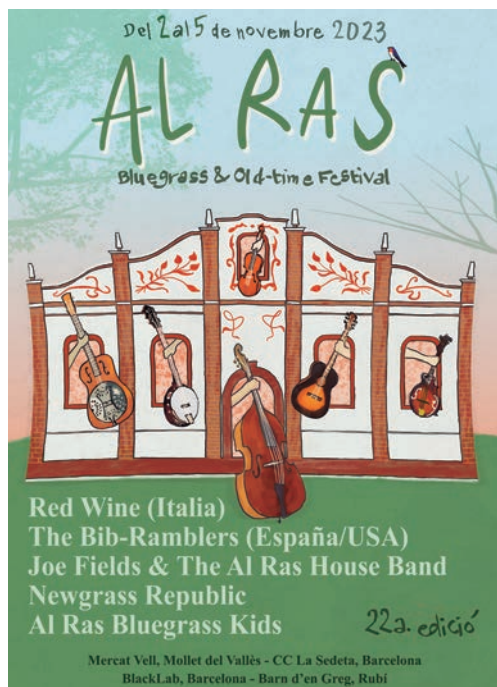
year award last year from the Texas Sounds International Country Music Awards. The Al Ras House band is composed of jammers and organizers like guitarist Jorge Rodríguez who make up the core of our regular jams.

Another important part of the festival is the Bluegrass Kids program. Kids train during the day on Saturday and give a short performance that night on the festival stage. The program started when Maribel Rivero, one of the house bassists for our jams and an inspiring kids music teacher, combined forces with violinist Oriol Saña to create a bluegrass program for our kids.

We later found out about the California program Kids On Bluegrass, and last year Christopher Howard Williams, the international chair of the IBMA, asked banjo player and lead Al Ras organizer Lluís Gómez to accompany Maribel Rivero to teach the first kids camp last year at La Roche, the biggest bluegrass event in Europe. With the kids camp, the once-a-month slow jam, and our camp in the spring, a curious kid can learn a lot about bluegrass music even if they can't travel to the U.S.!

## THE AL RAS BLUEGRASS CAMP

The Al Ras Bluegrass Camp is a unique experience, different from most bluegrass camps found in the United States.



The Bluegrass Kids onstage at Al Ras Bluegrass Festival 2022.



Although it primarily spans one day, it has grown to include a few additional days to accommodate shows with visiting teachers.

The camp takes place at La Sedeta, an old factory that once produced silk stockings, which was transformed into a cultural center for the Eixample neighborhood. It has become an essential location for the community, hosting, in addition to the camp, a night of the festival and various special events, particularly when talented bluegrass musicians pass through the area.

The camp offers a Friday night welcome jam and a teachers' concert. Saturday kicks off with early instrument classes, followed by a communal lunch break at 2 pm (Spanish lunchtime). The day continues with practice in assigned combos and culminates in a student concert featuring the bands and a raffle for exciting prizes, such as a year's subscription to ArtistWorks. The weekend concludes with a bluegrass jam and brunch on Sunday, generously hosted by American expat Greg Ryan at El Barn D'en Greg, his country line-dance venue.

The camp has welcomed esteemed instructors like John Reichmann, and this year, participants eagerly anticipate learning from the legendary guitar picker and Homespun Video producer Steve Kaufman.

The Al Ras Bluegrass Community takes pride in its warm and inviting atmosphere, celebrating a passion for bluegrass music that spans generations. With a festival, regular jams, and a unique camp experience, it continues to thrive and welcome music lovers from all walks of life.

Learn more about  
Al Ras Bluegrass and  
Old Time Festival




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**SCAN HERE FOR DETAILS AND TO ENTER:**  
 DRAWING AT CBA ANNUAL MEETING: OCT 14, 2023  
 NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN



## CALIFORNIA BANDS: APPLY FOR VERN'S STAGE 2024!

By Jim Duber, Vern's Stage Entertainment Coordinator

We're looking forward to another great year of entertainment on Vern's Stage in 2024! The Vern's Stage committee is pleased to announce an open call for bands for this special stage at the 2024 CBA Father's Day Bluegrass Festival in Grass Valley. From Thursday, June 13 through Sunday, June 16, we expect to fill 17 slots of 35-minute sets. The submission process will open on or about September 1 and will remain open until midnight, Nov. 1, 2023.

This is a juried competition. A panel of judges will evaluate all submissions to determine our final selections.



Whole Hog on Vern's Stage 2023. Photo by Bob Free.

**To be eligible to perform on Vern's Stage, all bands must:**

- Be based in California
- Play bluegrass and/or old-time music.
- Have significant experience performing.
- Did not play Vern's Stage during the 2023 festival with the exception that youth bands (majority of members under the age of 18 as of June 13, 2024) are eligible in consecutive years.

### Video Demo Requirements

Bands must submit a newly-recorded, self-made, video demo with three songs/tunes representative of what they would play on Vern's Stage. The video must only include an introduction of the band, a clear statement of the date and location of the video, and three pieces be performed in a row – without any cuts or edits. Submit your recording as a YouTube or Dropbox (or similar) link. We expect cell-phone or tablet quality, not professionally-shot, videos. We recommend recording your demo in a quiet location, like a living room, backyard, etc.

**In addition, the submission form will ask you to provide the following:**

- Band photo (jpeg formatted, high-resolution/300dpi, approximately 3" wide)
- Biography of the band for publication in the festival program (between 200 to 400 words)
- List of dates and locations of your band's most recent 4-6 gigs
- List of days/times that your band is available during the festival

Complete eligibility and submission requirements as well as the online application form can be found on the CBA website within Vern's Stage sub-category of the "Bands" section on the Father's Day Festival event page.

Learn more and apply  
for Vern's Stage 2024





## CBA AT IBMA

cont'd from front page

for CBA's 50th anniversary," CBA Chair Pete Ludé said. It will be just one of the many ways that CBA is investing in the future of global bluegrass through leadership, networking, sharing knowledge, and mentoring tomorrow's bluegrass stars. Look for us at the Gig Fair!

The IBMA's World of Bluegrass business conference, awards shows, showcases, and music festival make for a tremendous experience for any bluegrass fan. For those looking for great connections and industry knowledge, it's not to be missed. Lani said it best when she said recently "You should come to Raleigh. It's a great time."



### CELEBRATING CALIFORNIA CONTRIBUTORS AND 2023 IBMA AWARD RECIPIENTS AND NOMINEES

#### NOMINEES



##### MOLLY TUTTLE & GOLDEN HIGHWAY

- Entertainer of the Year
- Instrumental Group of the Year
- Song of the Year
- Album of the Year

##### MOLLY TUTTLE

- Collaborative Recording of the Year
- Female Vocalist of the Year
- Guitar Player of the Year



**MARK SCHATZ**  
Bass Player of the Year



**FRANK SOLIVAN & DIRTY KITCHEN**  
Instrumental Recording of the Year



**JOHN REISCHMAN**  
Collaborative Recording of the Year



**PETER THOMPSON**  
Broadcaster of the Year



**CRYING UNCLE BLUEGRASS BAND**  
Momentum Band of the Year



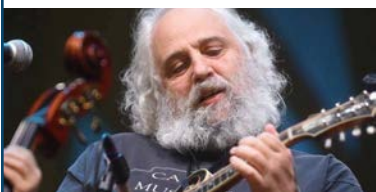
**GINA DILG**  
Graphic Designer of the Year

#### PERFORMERS

MOLLY TUTTLE & GOLDEN HIGHWAY  
AJ LEE AND BLUE SUMMIT

SEQUOIA ROSE  
(OFFICIAL SHOWCASE ARTIST)

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## OCTOBER'S FALL CAMPOUT AROUND THE CORNER

By Deb Livermore, CBA Campout Coordinator



Jamming at 2022 CBA Fall Campout. Photo by Robin Frenette.

Hi, and Happy Summer to you all! Is everyone having a great time in Bluegrass World this summer? I sure have been! But that does not keep me from thinking ahead. Can you guess what I'm thinking about? Here are some hints: music, friends, food, sunshine, repeat!

Yep, it's your favorite pre-winter experience – Fall Campout in Lodi! The dates this year are Oct. 9-15, and once again, the campout will be held at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds at 413 E. Lockeford St. in Lodi. Gates open at noon, Monday, Oct. 9.

The only cost is for camping – tents, cars, trucks, vans are \$10 per night; RVs are \$40 per night. These rates have not changed in several years. **Reservations are recommended – contact me at [deblivermore@gmail.com](mailto:deblivermore@gmail.com).**

We need items for the silent auction benefiting the Youth Program – CBA memorabilia is great, but anything works! Saturday night will include the CBA Annual Members meeting at 6 p.m. in Jackson Hall. We'll review the past year's activity, hear questions and comments from members, and learn about the results of the board election. This will be followed at 7 p.m. by a youth concert with Salty Sally, and more to be announced. The concert is just \$15. We'll have fantastic sandwiches and salads from Box Cart Deli Thursday through Saturday.

Thanks all – continue to have a safe and sane summer in Bluegrass World (and the other world as well)! See you in Lodi in October!



Broken Compass perform at 2022 CBA Fall Campout. Photo by Robin Frenette.



# ADVICE FOR TRAVELING PICKERS

*cont'd from front page*

to Japan on ZipAir, the new Japanese budget carrier – and while they were fine with our instruments en route to Japan, they almost refused to let us carry them on when we were returning to the States. It didn't make sense; the plane was half empty.

We also took the train around Japan. John was able to bring his guitar and we had no problem bringing our fiddle and mandolin. Andrew borrowed a bass at every gig rather than risk bringing his bass overseas and being turned away on the trains. Also, you may find yourself packed like sardines on a rush-hour Japanese train.

A question that I get asked a lot is “What is it like playing bluegrass for foreign audiences?” All of my experiences with international concerts have been fantastic because of the amazing audience reception. They must be bluegrass or folk fans, otherwise they wouldn't be coming to our shows, right? But the style in which the reception is given definitely varies from country to country. In Japan, the audiences were very respectful of the performance while still showing enthusiasm. They often didn't clap after breaks but showed their support after each song. In France, the audience was jubilant and unreserved in their appreciation. It was a mixture of these two in Finland – we toured there in 2019. Some of the audiences were vocally appreciative while we were performing, while at other venues, they waited to clap at the end of each song. While bluegrass has been regaining some popularity in the States, it's still a relatively-obscure genre overseas. I believe that because of this, foreign audiences become infatuated when they hear it performed live.

My number one recommendation for repertoire is to find some mainstream American pop or rock song and work it into your set

– it gives the audience something familiar to relate to and can really raise the energy. In Finland and Japan, we would sing John Denver's “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” and people would sing along despite the language barrier. They all knew the lyrics! At the La Roche Bluegrass festival, we ended our set with “Old Man” by Neil Young, and it was definitely a crowd favorite.

When it comes to booking places to stay, all I can say is that booking.com has some sweet deals that pop up the more you use it. After using it to find hostels along the Camino de Santiago in Portugal and Spain during my gap year, I was getting many 30 percent-off places just from the website's loyalty rewards. We found affordable hotels and hostels in Japan through that site. Speaking of hostels, I would also recommend hostelworld.com to find really cheap places to stay where you can also meet fellow travelers and engage in social activities (and maybe snag an extra fan to go support your shows.) In Nara, Japan, I stayed in a hostel and met travelers from all over the world. They invited me out for some really cool excursions that I wouldn't have known otherwise. At the end of Crying Uncle's tour in Japan, a few of the people I met through hostels came to Kyoto and watched our last show. I've heard good things about the app “Couchsurfing,” which lets you stay in people's homes in exchange for upkeep and maintenance while the owners are away.

Of course, nothing beats being able to stay with locals during your tour. We were lucky that in Finland our friends not only arranged our entire tour, but also invited the band and our families to stay with them for part of it. There is no better way to get to know the culture and the people of a country than to stay with someone local. So bring distinctive little gifts from home to give to those who help you with your tour. It could be something from your hometown, or even band merch. It's the thought that counts!

You should also remember the time change. If you're not on a tight schedule, try and spend a day acclimating to the time change and even to the weather and location. Get your bearings, get a little rest, and then hit it hard.

My brother Teo and I grew up eating all kinds of food, so we look forward to trying new dishes.. One way to endeavor yourself to locals is to sample their food. You may not like what's offered, but if you at least try it, you will be looked upon more favorably. Avoid making negative comments about the food, and don't make faces. I love sushi, so being in Japan was a treat. In India, I actually had lamb dishes, which I don't normally do. I've even had reindeer in Finland, as well as some fried fish that was really tasty, but to this day, I don't know if it was sardines or something else.

Another thing that might make you more friends during your international travels is to try and learn a few sentences in the local language. Don't worry about butchering it or even understanding their reply. It's the fact that you're trying to speak their language at all that is important. Most people will appreciate that.

Despite not making much money playing abroad (usually, our goal is breaking even), playing music in other countries over the last few years has led me to make so many new friends, meet a lot of cool musicians, and even helped to keep bluegrass alive and relevant. If the opportunity to do the same ever arises for you, do whatever you can to make it happen and I promise that you'll love it.

Learn more about  
Crying Uncle  
Bluegrass Band



Miles Quale. Photo courtesy of Crying Uncle.



Crying Uncle Bluegrass Band perform at La Roche. Photo courtesy of Bluegrass in La Roche.



View of the audience at Bluegrass in La Roche. Photo by Emmanuel Marin.

# BLUEGRASS IN LA ROCHE

By Michael Luchtan for The Bluegrass Breakdown

A successful festival requires a combination of hard work, community, a sense of direction, and good luck. “Bluegrass in La Roche,” located in a quaint small town in the French Alps, is no different. The festival, now in its 18th year – and recently nominated as an IBMA Event of the Year – started thanks to the serendipitous encounter of a bluegrass musician, Christopher Howard Williams, and the cultural attaché for La Roche-sur-Furon, Didier Phillipe. They will be the first to tell you that the festival would never exist without the hardworking, dedicated, volunteer team of local Rochois who cover almost every aspect of the festival from security to the concession stand.

Over the years, as La Roche has grown in importance to the European bluegrass community, Christopher has been able to steer the festival so that it not only functions as the most important showcase for European bluegrass bands, but also cultivates an encouraging community that allows musicians to grow. These two traits intertwine to make Bluegrass in La Roche special, by providing opportunities for young talent to emerge, and focusing on the international aspects of the bluegrass world.

There are three ways, generally speaking, that bands get to play the La Roche main stage. The festival features renowned bluegrass bands from the U.S. open to an overseas tour, prominent bands from Europe, or promising bands rising through the La Roche pipeline. The La Roche pipeline is the structure that Christopher has developed over the years to foster new talent. In the early years, there was a band competition, with the winners invited back to the main stage of the festival. Nowadays, it’s evident, through the progression of bands from the “off” concerts that happen at local restaurants during the festival, to a slot on the smaller second stage, to their triumphant appearance on the main stage. An example from this year was the German band Johnny and the Yooahoos. I enjoyed them last year on the small stage, and I was happily impressed by how much they had improved, not only their musicianship but also their stagecraft, to prepare for their primetime slot on the main stage this year.

This opportunity for young talent to develop extends to the Kids On Bluegrass Europe (KOBÉ) camp that occurs simultaneously with the festival. Using the CBA’s Kids on Bluegrass as inspiration, Christopher has been able to leverage the popularity of the festival to pull together organizations around Europe who have bluegrass programs for kids. The kids camp is led primarily by Ti’Pierre and his associates at Jam Hall, a French organization focused on teaching kids to make music together year round. For the first year of KOBÉ, Maribel Rivero and Lluís Gómez came from Barcelona to replicate their program at the Al Ras Bluegrass Festival; this year, Jam Hall brought Petr Brandeys from the Czech Republic to work with the kids using the Wernick Method. The same focus on growing young talent is evident here too: Thomas Marinello, who grew up with Jam Hall, returned this year as a KOBÉ teacher.

The international focus of La Roche can’t be understated, especially when you see how it can be connected with this pipeline for developing new talent. The festival has done a great job bringing bands from diverse backgrounds together in a central place to mingle and jam, providing the opportunity for musicians from Europe to jam with experienced, sometimes quite legendary, musicians from the U.S., all the while making connections for new opportunities. In recent years, La Roche has taken “international” one step further, beyond the traditional confines of Europe and the USA. This is surely a reflection of the principle



9170 Km to Grass Valley!  
Photo courtesy of Bluegrass in La Roche.





Scenic La Roche. Photo by Emmanuel Marin.



Della Mae on stage at La Roche in 2019. Photo by Emmanuel Marin.

organizer also serving as international chair of the IBMA, and his conviction that if he should accept the responsibility of such a position, he should aim to do something during his tenure. In this respect, La Roche has provided a supportive venue for bands from Asia to play in front of an appreciative audience. For example, this year, the band Grassy Strings from Bengali, India, repeatedly told the crowd how powerful and inspiring it was for them to play in front of bluegrass fans at La Roche, and how grateful they were for the opportunity to casually jam with experienced musicians from Europe and the U.S., because they fell in love with bluegrass from the internet, playing and learning it in relative isolation from other bluegrass musicians. How La Roche can provide a stepping stone for bands to tour the U.S. is evident with Country Gongbang from Korea, who played their first show outside of Korea at last year's festival. This year, they were recipients of an IBMA travel grant to showcase at the International World of Bluegrass in Charlotte. The recognition that a band gets from playing the La Roche stage can change a band's understanding of themselves and what they

can accomplish. But it is not just what a band gets from coming to a place where they can connect with more experienced musicians. Even more promising is what they take home with them—they become keepers of the flame, and pass that flame on to any other musician in Calcutta they might jam with.

All of this happens behind the scenes. Let's not forget the real reason behind La Roche: it's a bluegrass festival with great music and atmosphere.

Bluegrass in La Roche is vital to international bluegrass because it provides a supportive venue for international bands and cultivates young talent, but it's the town of La Roche that makes the festival special and unique. Bluegrass in La Roche is not just a bluegrass festival, it's a bluegrass festival in the French Alps! Attendees not only get the chance to jam with long-distance friends and hear acts they have and haven't yet heard of, but they get to do it in a beautiful setting with welcoming people speaking a romantic language with a rich cultural heritage. If you come into town early on Thursday, you can shop the outdoor market, with beautiful braids of garlic

and fresh, local varieties of lettuce and other greens. One gets a sense of the place for the festival reflected in the full name of the town, La Roche sur-Furon: "the rock south of the Furon River." Lucky for us, if you happen to pass by that rock on the first weekend of August, you will have the special opportunity to enjoy the unique sounds of the wonderful world of European bluegrass.

Learn more  
about Bluegrass  
in La Roche



*"Using the CBA's Kids on Bluegrass as inspiration, Christopher has been able to leverage the popularity of the festival to pull together organizations around Europe who have bluegrass programs for kids."*



Country GongBang at Bluegrass in La Roche. Photo by Emmanuel Marin.



# FIRST-PERSON PICKIN' REPORT FROM KIDS ON BLUEGRASS EUROPE

By Pablo Luchtan for the Bluegrass Breakdown

I am 10 years old and I have been playing fiddle for one-and-a-half years. I first learned to play with my dad at the slow jams, and also from Maribel Rivero at the Barcelona Bluegrass Camp. Last year, everyone from Spain went to La Roche to help get the European "Kids on Bluegrass" started. I went back again for the second year.



Pablo Luchtan. Photo courtesy of Michael Luchtan.

**Day 1:** On the first day, we worked on chords. I learned how to chop D, A, G, and C chords. They told us how to read the chords of the guitar player if we don't know the chords for a song.

We met at nine in the morning and worked until noon. We played "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" and "Handsome Molly." There were four fiddlers, one guitarist, two bassists, two mandolins, four banjos, and two ukuleles.

We had three teachers: Petr Brandeys from the Czech Republic led the camp; Thomas Marinello is a teenager from France who is helping out; and Ti' Pierre is the big organizer from France. They are all really nice.

**Day 2:** Today we played "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" at the beginning of the day, then we split into two groups to jam. We were told that if you don't know the melody for a song, you should try to play over the chords.

Petr told us about the Wernick Method. We sat in a circle to jam and everyone had to sing in the chorus, "sí o sí." We also learned how to communicate

nonverbally during a jam to see if someone wants a solo. I got to lead "Will the Circle Be Unbroken."

**Day 3:** Today is the last day. We started by practicing "Cripple Creek" in G.

Then we practiced "You Are My Sunshine" and "Will The Circle." We made arrangements of the songs, and prepared for the big show at 11:30 a.m..

We rehearsed the show beforehand, then my shoe broke, and Ti' Pierre introduced us to a big crowd. On stage, I felt nervous and excited about the show.

The first song we played was "You Are My Sunshine," then we introduced ourselves and started playing "Cripple Creek." And for the last: "Will the Circle Be Unbroken."

Afterwards, everyone started clapping and I felt relieved. Later, I went back to the room to change into my other shoes.

I want to say thank you to the teachers and all the hard work they did this week. I hope I can go again next year!



## FINE ART PRINTS



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*Mountain Laurel was a bluegrass band in Grass Valley 1988-2011*

*Drawing features L-R: Paul Siese, Kathy Barwick, Pete Siegfried, Ken Nillson, Doug Bianchi*





Red Wine. Photo by Giovanna Cavallo.

# BLUEGRASS AND RED WINE

ITALIAN BLUEGRASS COMES TO CALIFORNIA

By Maggie Sokolik, CBA Global Connections Director

*Red Wine, an Italian bluegrass band, has had connections with California bluegrass for many years. Their style encompasses traditional and contemporary bluegrass, country, gospel, and swing. The band members include Martin Coppo on mandolin, Silvio Ferretti on banjo, Lucas Bellotti on bass, and Marco Ferretti on guitar.*

*Red Wine has toured Europe since 1984, performing at major international festivals. Following the success of their 2008 30th anniversary celebration concert in Genova, Red Wine started an annual tradition – The Red Wine Bluegrass Party – with familiar California artists such as Laurie Lewis & Tom Rozum, Peter Rowan, Kathy Kallick, Annie Staninec, and others.*

*Member Silvio Ferretti graciously agreed to discuss their experience as an international touring bluegrass band.*

**Maggie Sokolik:** First, how did you get started as a band?

**Silvio Ferretti:** The band was founded in 1978 by yours truly and Beppe Gambetta, we had played as a duo since 1976, but became a band with the addition of a bass player and another guitar player. Martino Coppo became a member in 1981 and

has been Red Wine's front man since.

**MS: What attracted you to bluegrass music?**

**SF:** I got hooked to the sound of bluegrass and old-time music through a set of records that I "stole" from an uncle when I was 16. Flatt and Scruggs were on it, along with Doc Watson, Clarence "Tom" Ashley, Jean Ritchie, Odetta, Mike Seeger, Pete Seeger and the Weavers, and other "Folk Scare" musicians. I loved the banjo, of course, and that was a big part of my love for bluegrass and old-time music.

**MS: Do you think of bluegrass as a particularly American form, or a form of global or world music?**

**SF:** It was a totally American form in the beginning, but as it spread outside the South and Midwest first, then to Europe and Asia, it truly became an international musical language, pretty much like jazz in the same years.

**MS: What is your fan base like in Italy?**

**SF:** Hard to tell... it used to be people of my age, who had lived through the magic '80s when bands from the U.S. and other

European countries came to play. Now, it still comprises the same people, plus their children. Some of those children are putting bands together, and they are ready to admit that Red Wine was a strong inspiration for them to play bluegrass. Also, like in the U.S., the "O Brother" effect was pretty strong in Italy, and now the Billy Strings effect is taking place, so we have high hopes to enlarge our fan base.

**MS: Do you stick to the bluegrass "standards," or do you write original music for the band?**

**SF:** We hardly ever play bluegrass standards, though we love traditional bluegrass. The songs we play are derived from multiple sources (folk, country, rock, singer/songwriters, etc.), and we write some originals, too.

**MS: You participated in the CBA Jam-a-thon. How did you get involved? What was that experience like? Did it have an impact on your band in a new or interesting way?**

**SF:** The great Kimber Ludiker, who's been a friend for several years now, got us involved in that, and we loved it – in spite of our stone-age technical means – we had great fun

and we would like to do it again and again. As for the impact on the band, it sure showed us that we have a lot to learn regarding online performances.

**MS: What's ahead for you as a band?**

**SF:** Besides a festival in Switzerland and local gigs, we have a new CD coming out (possibly) in the next couple of months, also our annual "Red Wine Bluegrass Party" at the end of October, and it seems we're looking at a fairly busy winter with European dates in the works at this time.



**Catch Red Wine as they tour California!**

**Thursday, Sept. 7 - Jefferson Center for the Arts, 1125 Pine Grove Dr. Mt. Shasta, CA 96067**  
jeffersoncenterforthearts.com

**Friday, Sept. 8 - Chochmat Ha Lev, Featuring Kathy Kallick**  
2215 Prince St. Berkeley, CA  
oldschoolconcerts.com

**Saturday, Sept. 9 - Sebastopol Community Center, 390 Morris St. Sebastopol, CA 95472**  
seb.org

Check [redwinemusic.net](http://redwinemusic.net) for dates in the US and Europe.



A California takeover with Red Wine at La Roche in 2018. Photo courtesy of Red Wine.

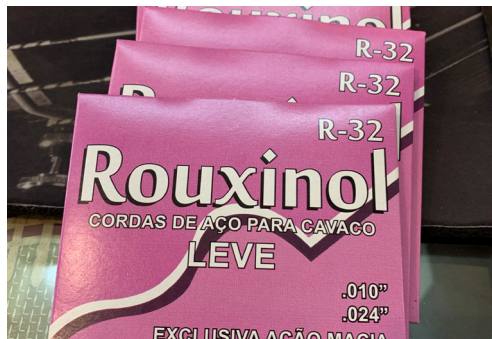


Red Wine Bluegrass Party with Kathy Kallick and Annie Staninec. Photo by Giovanna Cavallo.





Quito, Ecuador's Mindalae Museum.



Portuguese cavaquinho strings, ready for choro.



Inside Sabino Huaman's lutherie shop in Cusco, Peru.

# THE TRAVELING LUTHIER

Story and Photos by Gary Lewandowski, Cedar Mountain Mandolin Company, for The Bluegrass Breakdown

I am a full-time luthier, building mandolins and archtop guitars for my company, Cedar Mountain Mandolin. Therefore, my idea of a perfect vacation has been anything that doesn't involve building or working on an instrument.

That's recently changed. With the pandemic winding down, I've been able to resume traveling, taking the trips that I postponed because of COVID. I had several trips stacked up back-to-back this past year, and I needed a break from my shop.

Northern Portugal was my first stop. We were staying in the town of Porto in northern Portugal when a friend texted me asking if I could look around for a specific set of strings for his Brazilian cavaquinho. He has had a very difficult time sourcing them in the US. A quick Google search of Porto turned up a handful of guitaras (guitar stores) in Porto that carried the strings, along with fine handmade acoustic instruments. After a lively negotiation with my family, I managed to break free for 45 minutes to visit Porto Guitarra, where I bought their entire stock of cavaquinho strings.

They also had a wall of fine, handmade instruments, and I couldn't resist trying out a few of their bandolims. This caught the

eye of the owner, Agostinho Rodrigues. It turns out that Agostinho is also a luthier, and we share a passion for Brazilian choro music.

I must concede that building instruments is baked into my DNA so I couldn't help but hang out admiring the instruments Agostinho built, discussing lutherie, and playing a little choro. As I was leaving his shop, he invited me to join him and some local friends in their weekly choro roda (jam session). What a surprise! I had never given any thought to the existence of luthiers outside of the U.S., much less stumbling into an obscure choro roda in northern Portugal. With this unique experience, my circle of friends had just expanded to include a guitar shop owner/luthier, and his Portuguese cadre of choro-loving musicians.

Fast forward a few months, and we found ourselves exploring the narrow downtown streets of Cusco, Peru, where we stumbled across the sign for Sabino Huaman's luthier shop.

My DNA kicked in again, and into the shop we went, where we spent the next hour admiring his instruments and, in my practically non-existent Spanish, tried to discuss instrument construction. A trend was

developing!

Next stop on this adventure landed us in Quito, Ecuador. With a few spare days to fill, we decided to visit the Mindalae Museum (mindalae.com.ec).

It's a private museum focused on Ecuadorian culture and artistry. I soon discovered that it included an entire floor of indigenous string, wind, and percussion instruments. Our guide was a musician. When I told him I was a luthier who builds mandolins, he got excited and invited us to accompany him and play some of the museum's instruments in an impromptu jam session. You just can't make this stuff up. Now I have a new best musician-friend in Quito.

The takeaway from these events is that music is universal across cultures and all you have to do is scratch the surface to step into that world. Next time you're traveling and tire of visiting cathedrals, or need a break from travel companions, try visiting a local music shop. As a musician, you have an instant connection with folks from other cultures that can lead to some experiences you'll remember fondly forever.



**Do you have a story about Tony Rice?**  
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— Bill Amatneek



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# WESTPORT FOLK AND BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

## BOUTIQUE FESTIVAL DRAWS 1,500 TO QUAIN T IRISH TOWN IN COUNTY MAYO

By The Bluegrass Breakdown, Photos courtesy of Westport Folk Festival

The 17th “Westport Folk and Bluegrass Festival,” sponsored by CBA and others, took place over the weekend of June 9–11, 2023.

During that weekend, fifteen different acts from the USA, Ireland, UK, and Europe played 25 different events – ranging from ticketed concerts and pub gigs, to formal and spontaneous sessions.

The program also featured a gospel-hour concert, traditional square dance, academic presentations, workshops, and the first Irish traditional music and bluegrass joint session. Festival director and producer Uri Kohen reported that “all festival events recorded a high level of attendance, all ticketed events were sold out, and all other events reached full capacity.”

“It’s a really pretty town, and the atmosphere in the pubs is usually kicking,” said Irish old-time fiddler and banjo player Gerard McGranaghan, who has attended the festival since 2017. He said attendees to the festival, which is held at pubs and venues throughout town, stay at hotels and Airbnbs. Some people camp on the grounds at Westport House, a Georgian-era estate, for a fee.

Improvements for 2023 included the establishment of an official box office and information point, improved sound production, the increased use of social media platforms to better engage with audiences, and a collaboration with a local bookstore to create a specialized bluegrass-book front-window display.

The festival’s draw is better than ever, based on reports from local businesses

providers, with the level of domestic and international visitors to the town throughout the weekend (for the festival specifically), greatly exceeding the numbers from previous years.

“All involved in the festival weekend – musicians, music fans, accommodation providers, host venues, sponsors, and collaborators – have acknowledged the execution of all festival events ... [are at] the highest artistic levels and production values,” Uri said.

The SLO County Stumblers said of their visit to Westport in 2022: “From the minute we arrived, until the final square dance, we were treated fabulously. Our accommodations were perfect and in the best possible location, a convenient walk to all the venues.”

The festival’s new research collaboration between universities also came to

fruition over the festival weekend; representatives from U.S. and Irish universities had the opportunity to meet, engage, and network with each other and other representatives from universities from the UK and Spain. The festival also included a presentation by Dr. Greg Reisch, professor at Middle Tennessee State and director of Spring Fed Records, on the restoration of recordings of the family of fiddler Ed Haley.

Perhaps Gerard put it best: “Come to Westport for your music fix, and get exposed to Ireland’s small roads, pints of Guinness, and late nights.”

Learn more about  
Westport Folk and  
Bluegrass Festival



A prime example of a jam-packed Irish pub session.



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# TRAFARIA CELEBRATES SECOND ANNUAL BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

PICKERS FROM CALIFORNIA AND AROUND THE GLOBE CELEBRATE FREE BLUEGRASS IN SCENIC PORTUGUESE BEACH TOWN

By The Bluegrass Breakdown

Following the celebrated launch of this one-of-a-kind gathering in Portugal in 2022, the village of Trafaria hosts its second annual International Bluegrass Music Festival this month, from September 8-10. The festival features several U.S.-based musicians, including one that many long-time California bluegrass devotees will recognize.

This CBA Global Connection partner event – and Portugal's first-ever bluegrass festival – drew an estimated 3,000 in 2022 to this beach village at the mouth of the Tagus River, across from Lisbon. The event takes place on several stages across town, and was born from the inspiration of artist and musician Andre Dal.

Describing how the festival began, Andre said: "I explained how a bluegrass festival works to a local non-profit organization and they loved the idea." The novelty of bluegrass in Portugal,

combined with the power of a festival to both bring together a community and create a platform for it to show off its hospitality to the world, also helped Andre to recruit support from the local government, as well as several international sponsors, to get things started

"The bands' musicians and locals felt the village had a great atmosphere. The side activities were also packed with people trying to discover more about the village. Children and adults were eager to learn more about bluegrass music as well," Andre said.

Residents and participants alike lauded the music and organization of the first-year festival, and so, Andre and Trafaria's bluegrass festival by the river is back for its second year.

The street festival is free, and in addition to the six bands taking various stages over three days, there will be workshops by the

performing artists, jam sessions with local musicians and guest artists, guided tours of Trafaria, storytelling, and other local street fare to enjoy. This year, the town is keeping the buses running until after the last show to make sure everyone is well taken care of.

Andre also leads the country's only bluegrass band, The Stonebones & Bad Spaghetti, who will be joined on stage at Trafaria by former Bay-Area bluegrass stalwart Chris Smith. Chris founded the band "The Mighty Crows" before moving to Washington state.

Chris met Andre in 2022 on a trip to Portugal. Before leaving for Portugal, Chris looked up bluegrass players there. "There aren't many. I found Andre online and connected with him on Facebook. He is Mr. Bluegrass in Portugal. Andre is a great banjo player," Chris said. "We hit it off right away. He set up a jam at a hostel in Lisbon

shortly after my family arrived. It was a party. We even had a few hostel guests pull up lyrics on their phones and sing along. They organized another jam for me, months later, before we flew home to California. Bluegrass people are pretty darn cool."

Another former-Californian also appearing at the festival is Chris Luquette of The Chris Luquette East Coast Bluegrass Band. Chris is a two-time Grammy nominee, formerly of Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen.

We're excited to see Trafaria back for year two this month, and look forward to reporting on the festival in the future.

Learn more  
about Trafaria  
Bluegrass  
Festival



View of the street scene at Trafaria. Photo by Felipe Lima.



Sweden's "The Original Five" play Trafaria's Church Stage. Photo by Felipe Lima.

## RESERVE YOUR ROOM FOR GREAT 48!



Ring in the New Year with bluegrass songs and old-time tunes! The Bakersfield Great 48 jam returns even more family and beginner friendly than ever. Save January 4 through 7, 2024, to celebrate a new year of jamming – and Earl Scruggs' 100th birthday!

Great 48 hotel reservations for CBA members open August 15, 2023, at the Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center.

See our website for detailed  
information and registration.



### NEW THIS YEAR: WERNICK METHOD JAM CLASS

Get a jump start on bluegrass jamming with this multi-day class taught by Mike and Gail Thomas.

Separate registration is required. See website for details.





## CBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS OPEN!

► VOTE BY OCTOBER 14 ◀

The election for the CBA Board of Directors is now open! Around September 1, all current CBA members should receive an email from "Election Buddy" with instructions on how to electronically cast your ballot for the nine CBA Board Positions. If you don't find your email, have any questions, or prefer to vote by mail, just contact us at [Ballots@CaliforniaBluegrass.net](mailto:Ballots@CaliforniaBluegrass.net) or call us at 844-258-4727. Voting closes on October 14.

For more info, scan here or visit [californiabluegrass.org/board-elections](http://californiabluegrass.org/board-elections) →



Christopher Howard-Williams of IBMA nominated event Bluegrass in La Roche sits in with IBMA nominee Crying Uncle Bluegrass Band on stage.

Photo by Emmanuel Marin.



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## Monthly Trivia Quiz

By Bert Daniel and The Bluegrass Breakdown

In July, we asked: "Who recorded with Bill Monroe and made Sonny Osborne's banjo?"

CBA members Louis Kaplan and Bob Palasek knew the answer is Rual Yarbrough, a banjo player from Bonnettsville, Tenn., who worked with Flatt and Scruggs, Jim and Jesse, Vassar Clements, Tommy Jackson, and Herschel Sizemore before being hired by Bill Monroe for the Bluegrass Boys in 1969. He would make 21 recordings with Monroe, in addition to many recordings of his own acts.

He was also known for his skilled instrument repair, and owned Rual's Music Service in Muscle Shoals, Ala. He is said to have worked on instruments for many notable acts in rock and bluegrass, The Allman Brothers Band and Jimmy Martin. He even had Bill Monroe's mandolin on his bench for a time. According to the October 1978 Bluegrass Unlimited magazine, he made a six-string banjo for Sonny Osborne that was so impressive that J.D. Crowe bought one, too.

Sonny worked on banjos with other luthiers: Frank Neat, as pointed out by Melinda Russell; and Lincoln Hensley, as pointed out by Don Armstrong; but, to our knowledge, those luthiers never played with Bill Monroe, though Sonny himself did.

We flipped a Dunlop Tortex .88 mm wedge-shaped plectrum to determine Louis Kaplan is the winner of a shiny new set of D'Addario strings.

## SEPTEMBER TRIVIA CHALLENGE

For this Global Connections issue, our trivia question recognizes CBA members know that bluegrass has become an international genre. So, "name the alphabetic Scandinavian band that played on the main stage at Grass Valley."

Send answers to:  
[trivia@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:trivia@californiabluegrass.net)  
 no later than September 30.

This month's prize is our limited-edition "Founder's Celebration" 11x17" letterpress event poster honoring Carl Pagter. 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 November Bluegrass Breakdown.