



# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

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



SCRUGGS  
ISSUE

Dec. 2023



Patrick Sauber (center front) and his CBA Music Camp students. Photo by Alan Bond.

## THE GOLDEN STATE OF BLUEGRASS BANJO

### PICKERS ON SCRUGGS' INFLUENCE TODAY

By Dave Berry and The Bluegrass Breakdown

In the lineage of bluegrass banjo, all roads lead to Scruggs. For our Scruggs centenary tribute, we wanted to hear today's players' take on the master's relevance and impact on their own musicianship, 100 years after his birth. Our colleague, writer and picker Dave Berry, crafted interview questions, and we sent them to some of our favorite banjo players in California bluegrass.

For those who are new to bluegrass, or have never heard Scruggs, here's an idea of what you've been missing out on: "Imagine this," said 2022 Steve Martin Banjo Prize winner Bill

Evans. "Here's a musician who created an entire vocabulary and new technique of playing that not only included virtuosic and breath-taking solos, but also superb backup support for a singer and other instruments. This musician also composed the most popular instrumentals that are still played on the instrument 50-to-70 years after their composition. And to top it off, this style has been embraced by millions of other players. Is there anyone else on any other instrument that has done this in American music? Not that I can think of."

"The way he danced with and around a melody was enthralling. He was so able to express his voice and styling on the instrument that it became the foundation for how to play in a three-finger style," High Water Line Band banjo player Tyler Stegall noted.

"It's really astounding how he invented the vocabulary all bluegrass banjo players inevitably use, and played it so perfectly, as if he'd known how to do it for hundreds of years," said George Guthrie of Laurie Lewis and the Right Hands. "His playing is so

[cont'd on page 8 →](#)



## A NOTE FROM THE BEAR

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY EARL!

By Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director

I first got hooked on the banjo back when I was in my 20's and, like most aspiring pickers at the time, I listened non-stop to Flatt & Scruggs recordings, and leaned play from the legendary "Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo" instruction book. As I'm sure you're aware, there is a healthy debate as to who really is responsible for the invention of bluegrass music: Bill Monroe certainly had the band name and promotional clout, but it was only after Earl Scruggs became a Blue Grass Boy in December 1945 that they set the world on fire. Regardless of the specific origin story, Scruggs' impact on popularizing this new music genre is indisputable. Since the 100th anniversary of Earl's birth is coming up in just a month, we wanted to celebrate a bit in this issue of the Bluegrass Breakdown. You'll find some great stories about one of my favorite music heroes.

This is also a good time to remind you that we have

[cont'd on page 2 →](#)

## FATHER'S DAY FESTIVAL LINEUP, MEMBER TIX SALES OPEN

By The Bluegrass Breakdown

Father's Day Festival is just over 6 months away – is it too early to start making plans? Of course not! Tickets go on sale exclusively to CBA members December 1, and there are a lot of great acts to talk about, with more to come!

CBA welcomes back to Father's Day Festival banjoist, Grammy winner, and IBMA Banjo Player of the Year Alison Brown on the heels of her extraordinary 2023 release "On Banjo." While staying connected to her bluegrass roots, for "On Banjo," Brown explores the repertoire that has shaped her own playing – including Brazilian

choro and bossa nova, classical string quartets, and swing-era jazz.

Sister Sadie has been on the bluegrass charts for much of 2023 with the release of the single "Willow," and is set for a 2024 return appearance at CBA's flagship summer festival.

And we're also excited to share that Danny Paisley and the Southern Grass is coming to Grass Valley for our June shindig. It's great to see Danny fronting this second generation of a beloved traditional bluegrass band after beating throat cancer in 2023.

From Astoria, Ore., Gabrielle Macrae and Barry Southern are The Horsenecks, and will be making their first appearance at Father's Day Festival. The duo span subgenres of bluegrass with early country songs, traditional fiddle and banjo tunes, and original material.

Country Gongbang has been making waves in bluegrass around the world since their appearances at LaRoche Bluegrass Festival and IBMA in the past year. This Korean band formed in 2015, but gained an audience world-wide with

[cont'd on page 8 →](#)



FDF Main Stage. Photo by Robin Frenette.



# Celebrate Earl Scruggs' 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday

**Saturday, January 6, 2024**  
Buck Owens' Crystal Palace  
Bakersfield, Cal.

**Doors at 5:30 - Show at 7:30**  
Come early for dinner!



## Presented by All-Star Band

Bill Evans, Jim Nunally, Chad Manning, Tom Bekeny, Steve Pottier and Mike Witcher



## Featuring Special Guests

**Peter Rowan**  
**Herb Pedersen**



Tickets available at [BuckOwens.com/tickets](http://BuckOwens.com/tickets)



CALIFORNIA  
BLUEGRASS  
ASSOCIATION

Guitar  
*Masters*

## BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

December 2023 – Scruggs Issue

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

Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director and  
Editor in Chief

Jason Dilg, Managing Editor

Gina Dilg, Art Director and Layout Editor  
Susan Bartholomew, Copy Editor

## EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS

Dave Berry  
Sandy DeVera  
Zachary Dressel  
Donna Hargis  
Jon Hartley Fox  
Heidi Labensart  
Jeff Russinsky  
Joselyn Sky

## PHOTOGRAPHY CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Bond  
David Cupp  
Don and Danny Clark of the Bluegrass  
Bus Museum  
Robin Frenette  
The Earl Scruggs Center  
The Family of Horace Scruggs  
Gardner Webb University Special  
Collections

Printed in California by  
Mailing Systems, Inc.

Contact us for advertising, story ideas,  
or other information at  
[breakdown@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:breakdown@californiabluegrass.net)

3739 Balboa St. #5090  
San Francisco, CA 94121-2605  
(844) BLU-GRASS (844-258-4727)

A subscription to the Bluegrass Breakdown  
is a benefit of CBA membership.  
Visit us online at [californiabluegrass.org](http://californiabluegrass.org).



*Happy Holidays*

From The California Bluegrass Association

Illustration courtesy of Sam Hamrick / Fiddlebones

SUPPORT THE

**BLUEGRASS  
BREAKDOWN**

ADVERTISE WITH US!

[breakdown@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:breakdown@californiabluegrass.net)



## FATHERS DAY FEST

cont'd from front page

a 2020 IBMA Bluegrass Ramble Showcase Artist appearance that, because of the pandemic, was streamed internationally. Country Gongbang (named after a popular Korean phenomenon of students broadcasting themselves to create a kind of virtual study-hall vibe) toured the U.S. last year with the help of an IBMA International Band Performance Grant. We're thrilled they'll be back for a visit with us at Grass Valley!

Trey Wellington has not slowed down following the 2022 release of "Black Banjo," which showcases the talents of the 2019 IBMA Momentum Instrumentalist of the Year. He's kept a very busy touring schedule through 2023,

and has recently recruited FDF 2023 performers Jake Blount and Nelson Williams, as well as Kaia Kater, for the new Black string band New Dangerfield. We're thrilled to bring Trey and his band to FDF 2024.

Pre-sale tickets for CBA's Father's Day Festival are available to CBA members beginning December 1. If you're not already a member, this is a good opportunity to join! Keep up to date on new lineup announcements and other exciting news about the festival, Music Camp, and the CBA Youth Program events happening at Father's Day Festival at the CBA website [www.FathersDayFestival.com](http://www.FathersDayFestival.com). We'll see you there!



A late night square dance breaks out at Father's Day Fest. Photo by Alan Bond.

## WELCOME MESSAGE

cont'd from front page

a big celebration concert coming up on Earl's centenary - Saturday, Jan. 6 - in Bakersfield, as part of our Great 48 jam. As of this writing, the show is close to being sold out, so you'd better snatch up your tickets fast. You'll find all the details about this show elsewhere in this issue.

In addition, registration is now open for the Julian Family Fiddle Camp, to be held May 1-5 in Julian, about a 90-minute drive from San Diego. Camp director Adam Roszkiewicz has put together a stellar faculty of instructors, ensuring a memorable music and community experience. As if that wasn't enough, pre-sale tickets for the Father's Day Bluegrass Festival are now on sale to CBA members! You can read about our line-up of main-stage bands in this issue.

And as always, the Festival, to be held June 13-16 in Grass Valley, will have lots of kids' activities, free workshops, square-dancing, food and craft vendors and - most importantly - the best bluegrass and old-time jams west of the Rockies.

As always, we're on the lookout for new (and returning) volunteers to help out at the festival, and our many other events around California. If you'd like to learn more, just drop us a line at [volunteers@CaliforniaBluegrass.net](mailto:volunteers@CaliforniaBluegrass.net). We're always interested in your comments and feedback - reach us at [Breakdown@CaliforniaBluegrass.net](mailto:Breakdown@CaliforniaBluegrass.net).

Happy holidays from all of us at the California Bluegrass Association!



## FDF RV LOTTERY OPEN NOW!

By The Bluegrass Breakdown



As in past years, full hook-up RV spots are in short supply, and will be assigned through our reservation lottery system. Lottery applications are being accepted from CBA members now through February 16, 2024. To apply, simply provide your name, address, phone number, email and CBA membership number (if known) to [FullHookup@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:FullHookup@californiabluegrass.net) or mail to: CBA FHU Lottery, 3739 Balboa St. #5090, San Francisco, CA 94121-2605. Reservations are for the Festival days - check-in

at noon Wednesday, June 12, and check-out 10 a.m. Monday, June 17, at 10:00am. Also, lottery winners will be given first chance to book the same site for pre-festival days, starting Saturday, June 8, at additional cost. Details can be found at [www.FathersDayFestival.com](http://www.FathersDayFestival.com)

More info on  
Father's Day  
Festival →



49TH ANNUAL

CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION

FATHER'S DAY

BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

ALISON BROWN - SISTER SADIE

DANNY PAISLEY & THE SOUTHERN GRASS

LONESOME RIVER BAND - RICK FARIS BAND

THE HORSENECKS - COUNTRY GONGBANG

TRAY WELLINGTON BAND

MORE BANDS TO BE ANNOUNCED!

NEVADA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS, GRASS VALLEY, CA - [FATHERSDAYFESTIVAL.COM](http://FATHERSDAYFESTIVAL.COM)

JUNE 13-16 2024







Earl Scruggs, far right, poses for a photo with (left to right) Birch Monroe, Chubby Wise, Bill Monroe, and Lester Flatt. Courtesy of the Earl Scruggs Center Collection.

# ‘\$60 A WEEK (\$10 FOR SUN)’

## Diaries Cornerstone of 2024 Scruggs Center Exhibit

By Zachary Dressel, Assistant Director and Curator, The Earl Scruggs Center, for The Bluegrass Breakdown

The image of Earl Eugene Scruggs would most certainly be etched onto the Mt. Rushmore of original bluegrass icons, if there was one. His style of banjo playing has been emulated by thousands of musicians since he first made waves alongside Bill Monroe as a Blue Grass Boy in late-1945. His life and career have been the subjects of hundreds of books, articles, essays, and Banjo Hangout blog posts written about this master of the five-string. However, Earl himself was always a man of few words. Combining through interviews of Earl leaves a striking realization that he largely had his story, and stuck to it, with very little deviation other than a small nugget of lore here or there. Short of a few fantastic books by the likes of Tommy Goldsmith, Dan Castellano, and Bob Carlin, the best written record of Earl Scruggs’ life comes from the biographical section of the much beloved “Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo” that Earl himself penned.

That was, until May of 2022.

That spring, the Earl Scruggs Center in Shelby, N.C., received a very generous donation from the family of Earl Scruggs, including such astounding pieces as the first capo that Earl ever made from 1943; Earl’s childhood desk, which his father built; original album artwork by Thomas Allen; and even such ephemera as the small tin box that Earl used to cover his banjo’s altered – some might say “damaged” – headstock when he installed his first cam tuners around 1951, as well as many others. These objects, when coupled with thousands of photographs, commercial and personal, are enough to make for several new additions to the exhibits at the Earl Scruggs Center. However, one discovery made creating an inventory of the collection will have a lasting impact on bluegrass history. Over 17,000 words of handwritten remembrances that Earl laboriously crafted over the course of his lifetime were found in a well-worn binder adorned with an image of Mickey Mouse. It is most likely that a large portion of the notes were made during the writing of “Earl Scruggs and the 5-String Banjo,” although many others seem to be written for a biographical text which never materialized.

Much of what is written comes across as a stream of consciousness made up of small, disconnected statements. But, when decoded alongside the more fleshed-out stories, these notes offer one of the most complete versions of Earl’s early life and career. It was apparent that these notes could be used alongside interviews with Earl and his musical peers to craft an exhibit that offers a fresh perspective on Earl’s life leading up to bluegrass’ “Big Bang” in December 1945, when he and Lester Flatt joined Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. From this realization the exhibit “Born of the Broad River: The Life and Career of Earl Scruggs in His Own Words 1924-1945” was created.

The exhibit will take the visitor on a journey to the place where Earl called home, the Broad River region. In this part of the American South, upstate South Carolina meets the North Carolina piedmont, creating a culture which melded the mountains with the foothills – and acted as an incubator for Earl Scruggs’ musical education. The young musician navigated childhood poor and fatherless, clinging to his family and music as a way to face the hardships that would haunt his earliest years. In music Earl would find his calling after his first public performance – at age 6 – created a yearning for show business in the young banjo prodigy. However, Earl held his family as a top priority. After graduating high school he took on the role of provider for his mother and youngest sister, moving them in the early 1940s from the farm in Flint Hill to the neighboring city of Shelby. It was here that Earl settled into life as a mill worker, treating his love of music as secondary to financial stability. In 1945, however, Earl got an offer he couldn’t refuse from WKNOX mainstay Lost John



Brothers Horace (left) and Earl (right) Scruggs. Courtesy of the family of Horace Scruggs.

*“When decoded alongside the more fleshed-out stories, these notes offer one of the most complete versions of Earl’s early life and career.”*



## *“The young musician navigated childhood poor and fatherless, clinging to his family and music as a way to face the hardships that would haunt his earliest years”*

Miller. Earl joined John in Knoxville in 1945, and they would travel to Nashville for a weekly performance on WSM. It was while in Nashville that Earl received yet another offer he couldn't refuse: a chance to play with Bill Monroe, who was, by this point, a Grand Ole Opry mainstay.

“Born of the Broad River” opens Jan. 13, 2024, at the Earl Scruggs Center as a celebration of Earl's 100th birthday and as the 10th anniversary of the center itself. The exhibit will feature items from the collections of the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame, the Eastern Tennessee Historical Society, the Center for Popular Music, and many others. Also, banjos from players who have been influenced by Earl at some point in their musical journey will be rotated throughout the year-long run of the exhibit.

It would be cruel to talk about the notes that Earl Scruggs left without sharing some of their contents. The following contains excerpts from the handwritten remembrances of Earl Scruggs that documents his move to Knoxville in 1945 and his audition for Bill Monroe later that year. In true Earl fashion, the story ends abruptly and with little fanfare.

“After the war ended in 1945 and workers were getting sufficient, a group I was picking with, the Orange Blossom Hillbillies (Paul Carpenter), went job seeking to WNOX Knoxville and to Chattanooga. No luck ... We

did do a guest spot on the WNOX Tennessee Barn Dance and a lot of picking backstage. Lost John Miller was a member at WNOX and had a band called the Allied Kentuckians. After getting back to Shelby, a couple days or so went by and the local police came to our house with a message to contact John. I called him and he wanted me to come to Knoxville and discuss going to work with him. I went (Grady Wilkie took me), and John told me his sponsor was giving him a choice of W.S.B. in Atlanta, Ga. or a Saturday morning 15 min. show on W.S.M. He would pay me \$50.00 a week and board.”

“I spent the first night in a \$1.50 Room at the Earl Hotel. No curtains, No Bath, only a sink. A torn window shade that would roll to the top if it wasn't handled very carefully. A strong odor of the JFG Coffee Factory. The noise of Street Cars. A Public bath down the hall in the Hotel.”

“We worked two weeks at WNOX before going to W.S.M. John had a House trailer approximately 8' x 22' parked behind a gas station in Knoxville. No bath, we used the public restroom at the gas station (this is where I learned to shave with cold water it worked fine and helped in times to come—when I made do shaving). John had a 41-year model Buick Special, that was a very underpowered Limo. He had a heavy home-made wood trailer to carry the instruments, clothes, candy which he sold on the road, etc. Tires were still hard to get and about 45 M.P.H. was all we were allowed to drive. He was not known outside WNOX so we lived in Knoxville and would drive over to Nashville each Friday night to do the Saturday morning radio show. We worked a few shows around Knoxville as far south as Georgia.

“One Saturday morning after the broadcast we were in our rooms when Dora (John's Wife) came and said John wanted to talk to us. The news was, John was broke and was having to disband. I was very sick with a cold, had a temperature and felt terrible. But I called Sh(u) mate's room and gave him the news. He called Bill and Bill was to be up very soon. John was wanting to get started back to Knoxville. I was able to stall him a while telling John my intentions. This wasn't too exciting for John, but since he hadn't paid any of us, he was patient a couple hours ...

It was probably 2 P.M. before Bill showed up and I lovingly picked him Sally G(odwin and Dear Old Dixie. Bill seemed very impressed but wanted me to stay and go down to the opry and pick with his band to see how it would sound and to get the other guys' opinion I suppose. I told him my ride was leaving and he said he would pay my Bus ticket if I would stay. There



Earl and Horace Scruggs. Courtesy of the family of Horace Scruggs.

was an 11:00PM Tennessee Coach Bus out that night that would get me into Knox. 7 or 8 A.M. Sunday morning.

We Picked and Picked and Picked, and about 10:50 I picked up my Banjo and told Bill I was catching the bus ... I told him I was very sick, had to get my clothes in Knoxville and that I was going to Shelby to try to get well. He said be back next Saturday ... except nothing had been said about what he paid or anything.

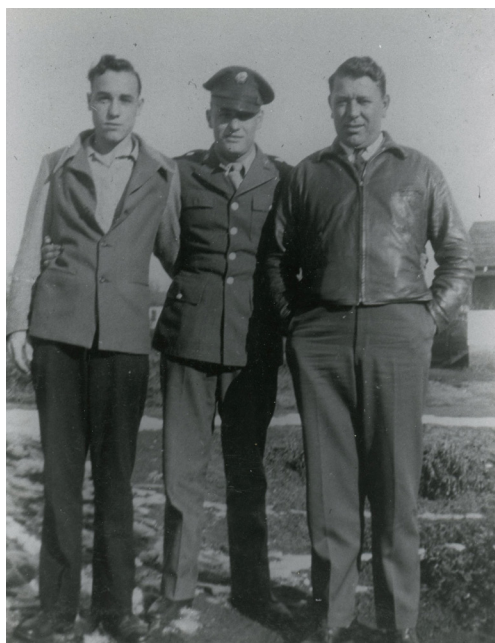
He said I pay everybody the same. \$60.00 a week (\$10.00 for Sun.) and you pay your Hotel and food plus any other expenses ...

I caught the Bus, paid for my ticket ... got on the bus the last minute, all seats were taken and I stood in the aisle all the way with the chills. My back hurt so bad from the hard chills I sat on the cold floor part of the way. Got to Knox. John and Dora was in bed. I told him Bill had given me a job, explained my sick problem and asked him to take me approximately 2 miles to catch the city bus or to take me into town but he refused.

I walked in the snow and waited for the Bus with my suitcase and belongings and a friend was waiting for me. He lived in Columbus, Ga. but was going by Charlotte, N.C. to buy a Bass Fiddle so I had a ride home. It was a Sunday, and he was driving fast and was caught speeding at Hot springs, N.C. He didn't have his registration papers for his car and we were held up in Hot Springs a few hours until he located a friend in Columbus who convinced the Police the car belonged to him. We got to Shelby Very late Sunday afternoon give out.

**The Earl Scruggs Center in Shelby, N.C., is a cultural destination, community gathering place, and educational resource on Earl Scruggs and the unique history and traditions of the community and region where he was born and raised.**

**Learn more about the center here →**



Earl, Horace, and Junie Scruggs (left to right) circa 1940s. Courtesy Gardner Webb University Special Collections.



# LESTER FLATT, HERB PEDERSEN, AND THE FOGGY MOUNTAIN BOYS

## ONE MAN'S FANTASY COMES TRUE

By Jon Hartley Fox for The Bluegrass Breakdown

In 1967, Earl Scruggs was the most famous and influential banjo player in the world. Herb Pedersen was a newcomer to Nashville, a 23-year-old banjo player from Berkeley at the beginning of his illustrious career. Herb was playing with the traditional duet of Vern Williams and Ray Park, now renowned in Northern California but then struggling to make a go of it with their brand of rough-hewn bluegrass. Vern and Ray (and Herb and their families) had moved to Nashville earlier that year, hoping to find management, a record deal and, generally, a better environment for making a living playing bluegrass than what they had left behind in Northern California.

Nashville wasn't much of a bluegrass town back then, with very few places for bluegrass bands to play. The band couldn't find much work, other than appearances on the Smilin' Eddie Hill early morning television program. With the blessing of Vern and Ray, Herb had taken a job playing banjo with Carl Tipton &

the Midstate Playboys, which had a weekly television program on Saturday afternoon on a station in Murfreesboro.

Herb was at home one night when his phone rang. The caller said he was Earl Scruggs, and Herb was convinced it was one of his Berkeley pals pranking him. It wasn't. That call led to a once-in-a-lifetime experience that changed Herb's life. Here's the story as he told it to me in a pair of recent phone interviews.

...

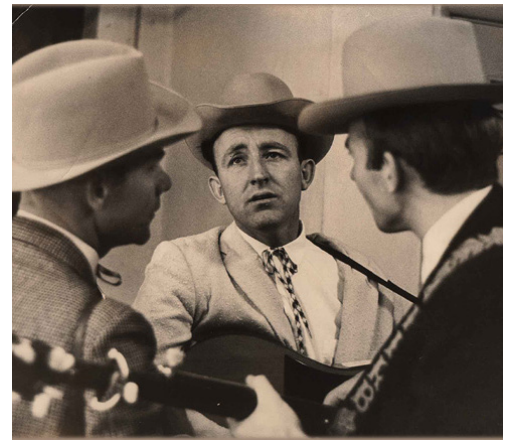
*I got a phone call. The voice sounded familiar, but I wasn't sure who it was. He said his name was Earl Scruggs, and I'm like, come on. Really? But he said he really was Earl, and he said, "I'd like to talk to you if I could." He said he'd seen me and liked my playing on Carl Tipton's show. He invited me out to his house and said, "Bring your banjo."*

*Well, I drove over there, to his place in Madison. I just sat in my car outside his ranch-style home for maybe ten minutes [trying to calm his nerves]. I went inside, and the first thing I saw when I walked through the door was the original Thomas Allen oil painting that was used for the cover of Foggy Mountain Banjo. And over there is the original Allen oil painting for the Songs of the Carter Family album.*

*We sat and talked for a spell before playing some. We played "Lonesome Road Blues" and "Flint Hill Special." Earl just played guitar. He said he wanted to hear my banjo playing. So, we ran through five or six tunes. It was all just incredible.*

*Then Earl said, "Herb, I'm afraid I kind of got you over here on false pretenses." He then explained that he was going to have surgery and would need to be off the road for a few months. Then he asked if I knew the Martha White theme song. I said I did, and he asked me if I wanted to play some jobs with Lester and the Foggy Mountain Boys.*

*He offered me the job. I didn't know quite what to say. I said "If you think I can do it," and he said "I know you can do it. I love your playing, and I'd love for you to do it." So, what could I say? I told him I would be honored to do the job. Two nights later, we went down to the [Grand Ole] Opry. He said to come by his house and to bring a change of clothes, and he'd take me down and introduce me to the fellows.*



Vern Williams, Ray Park and Herb Pedersen. Courtesy Herb Pedersen.

*"We drove to the Opry in Earl's Cadillac and parked behind the Opry house next to the Martha White bus. Earl told me to put my clothes on in the bus, and then we went inside. Lester and the Foggy Mountain Boys were just inside in the hallway, going over some stuff. Earl introduced me to Lester, and Lester asked me, "Son, did you bring your banjo with you?" I said I did and he said, "Well let's pick one." So we played "Salty Dog Blues." And Lester looked over to Earl and nodded to him.*

*Lester was really smooth and casual about it, and right before we went on stage, he asked me if I knew the Martha White theme. I told him I did, and he said, "Okay, then we're good to go." We went out and played our three songs, our portion of the show, and then it was over.*

*As soon as we finished at the Opry, we got on the bus and headed out for Smoot, W.V., which was our first gig. We set up and performed on top of the refreshment stand at the drive-in movie theater in Smoot. That was about the only place to play in some of those towns. From there we went down to North Carolina, then Virginia, then Knoxville on the way back to Nashville.*

*Riding on the Martha White bus was interesting. It was an old Continental Trailways bus, and the first six rows of seats were still there. We'd sit there and talk after the shows. Sometimes, we'd sing and work on vocals, while Jake [Tullock] was driving.*

*In the back of the bus, the seats were taken out. There were four army surplus cots bolted to the floor where you could lie down and sleep if you wanted to. They had little, thin mattresses and blankets. There was no bathroom. There was no refrigerator or anything. The bus was basically to get all of us from one place to another. It was pretty funky, but at that age, you're bulletproof. You can do anything. And I loved it.*

*All of the Foggy Mountain Boys were great to me, especially Josh [Graves]. He was definitely Uncle Josh every step of the way. He told me if I had a problem on stage, just nod to him and he'd cover it. They gave me one of those string ties they wore. But Lester didn't give me a hat. I had to go out and buy one.*

*About halfway through my tenure with the band. Lester had a heart attack and was replaced by*



Herb Pedersen plays at Grass Valley, 1976.. CBA File photo



*“Right before we went on stage, he asked me if I knew the Martha White theme. I told him I did, and he said, ‘Okay, then we’re good to go.’”*

Red Allen. So, you had Red replacing Lester and me replacing Earl. They made an announcement before those shows saying, “Neither Lester Flatt nor Earl Scruggs will be performing on tonight’s show. If you’d like to get your money back, go to the box office and get a refund.” A few people would leave, but most of them just wanted to hear some music, so they stayed.”

...

As Herb’s stint with the Foggy Mountain Boys was winding down, he got a call from Dean Webb of the Dillards. Doug Dillard had just left the band, and Dean was wondering if Herb might be interested in auditioning for the Dillards. Herb wanted to move back to California anyway, so this was a perfect opportunity to join one of the hottest bands around. Vern and Ray were also ready to return to California, as things just never really worked out for them in Music City.

Herb joined the Dillards as they were working on the album “Wheatstraw Suite.” He was with the Dillards until 1970 and the release of “Copperfield.” Both albums were quite influential and played a part in birthing the style of country-rock music. After he left the Dillards, Herb became a first-call session musician, appearing over 15 years on hundreds of records by such artists as



Herb Pedersen (left) at a workshop with Patrick Sauber (right) at South State 48 in 2022. Photo by David Cupp.



Lester Flatt (guitar) and Earl Scruggs (banjo) pose with the Foggy Mountain Boys in front of the Martha White bus. Courtesy Don and Danny Clark of the Bluegrass Bus Museum.

Beck, Rodney Crowell, the Doobie Brothers, Jonathan Edwards, Flying Burrito Brothers, Dan Fogelberg, John Fogerty, Vince Gill, Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris, Chris Hillman, Rose Maddox, Gram Parsons, Dolly Parton, John Prine, Linda Ronstadt, Diana Ross, Stephen Stills, Marty Stuart, James Taylor, Doc and Merle Watson, Jesse Winchester, and Dwight Yoakam.

Herb returned to live performing in the mid-1980s with the Desert Rose Band, which grew out of a band put together by Chris Hillman to tour with Dan Fogelberg’s. Herb subsequently made his way back to bluegrass, playing with the Laurel Canyon Ramblers and the John Jorgensen Bluegrass Band.

Along the way, he recorded three solo albums (“Southwest,” “Sandman,” and “Lonesome Feeling”); three duet albums with Chris Hillman (“Bakersfield Bound,” “Way Out West,” and “At Edwards Barn”); three collaborations with Tony Rice, Larry Rice and Hillman; and various other one-off groups like Here Today and Old & in the Gray.

Herb Pedersen’s stint playing banjo alongside Lester Flatt (and later, Red Allen) and the Foggy Mountain Boys lasted for only three months, but it changed Herb’s life and musical outlook. That phone call from Scruggs was the best kind of affirmation a young banjo player could receive. It’s no wonder Herb had trouble initially processing the call. Here was the man who practically invented bluegrass banjo – EARL SCRUGGS! – recruiting Herb to substitute for him. Pretty heady stuff for a young man from Berkeley. Herb today calls it his “miracle gig dream job.”

“It was an education,” says Pedersen of sitting in for Earl Scruggs. “It really was. I learned so much about the music business. It was a whole new world for me. Every Thursday, Lester insisted on us getting haircuts. Coming from the Bay Area to that was a bit of culture shock, but I loved every minute of it. I wouldn’t have traded the experience for anything.”



## MICHAELA MAE MUSIC



Private Voice, Harmony,  
and Songwriting Lessons



Group harmony and  
songwriting classes



707-790-7991



michaelamaelesons@gmail.com



www.michaelamaemusic.com





# THE GOLDEN STATE OF BLUEGRASS BANJO

## Pickers on Scruggs' Influence Today

*cont'd from front page*

authoritative and definitive. It's like Charlie Parker or Jimi Hendrix, so often imitated, never replicated."

Keith Little, who's long list of recording credits includes Vern & Ray and The Dillards, puts, perhaps, a finer point on it: "For me, the real beauty of Earl's playing is the magical and polyrhythmic way he weaved melodies using three fingers ('actually it's two fingers and a thumb,' Earl would say), five strings, and four beats to the measure – the idea being that nothing works out evenly with Scruggs-style, which makes the sound so captivating and energetically infectious," he said.



Tommy Drinkard at FDF 2023. Photo by Robin Frenette.

Earl was also keenly aware of the band's sound and how he fit into it. "He was very serious about his music when he wanted to play; he wanted to make it right. He'd take all the time in the world to get it right. So there's that. He was the consummate musician," said Herb Pedersen.

"Earl was all about the band sound and how his banjo could best match whatever ensemble he was performing with at the time," said Bill Evans of Scruggs' musical philosophy. "He was also all about playing the melody, as his mother directed him to do when he was quite young. Along with this comes a certain amount of artistic restraint – you know he could play more, but he's choosing not to. Good advice for any musician!" Good advice, indeed!

Earl Scruggs was not only the creator of the sound that became known as bluegrass, but was also regarded as a soft-spoken and humble man, there for anyone who sought him out.

Tommy Drinkard of Water Tower describes this as "a zen-like quality to his performance" that came across in his studio work, live performances, and his off-stage encounters.

George Guthrie said, "I watched all of the live footage of the Flatt & Scruggs TV show on the [Grand Ole] Opry and heard live recordings, like 'Live at Carnegie Hall.' It's mesmerizing to watch Earl. He is so relaxed and completely in the zone, and works the mic perfectly. I read in an interview with Sonny Osborne that Sonny thought Earl got nervous, because he would sometimes kick tunes off way faster than the record, but you would never know it from watching him. He's one of the most calm and relaxed performers ever, and a complete virtuoso."

Keith Little remembered: "I was playing with Ricky Skaggs at the time, and we were at a rehearsal in Nashville for the 65th

anniversary of the Grand Ole Opry (where Earl and Sonny Osborne were to play a duet together). Earl was running late to the rehearsal (we later learned that he wasn't allowed into the rehearsal hall without credentials!), so Ricky decided to ask me to fill in for Earl and run the tune without him until he arrived. I don't even remember what the tune was, but we had only run it a few times when Earl magically appeared (after his wife Louise had sternly vouched for his entry into the rehearsal hall). Everyone was so happy to see Earl, and when it became apparent that he and I had never met before, both Sonny and Ricky quickly introduced us. We shook hands and I got to mention how much I admired his work before I quickly relinquished the banjo and went back to guitar. I remember Earl being very sweet that day, with a hilariously funny and dry wit. After we shook hands he said, 'It's nice to meet you, too. Allow me to introduce my road manager, Louise' (obviously referring to her ability to get him into the hall), and then chuckled as only Earl could do. Everybody cracked up, and it was a very memorable moment."

Bill Evans also shared: "I caught the [Earl Scruggs] Revue live in a small club in Charlottesville, Va., called the Mineshaft – and it was literally 100% underground, down a stairway, so it was an appropriate name for this kind of dank club. Very few people were there, and I was tremendously shy about bothering Earl, but I did go up and talk to him after the show. I don't remember what we talked about, but I do remember how soft-spoken he was, with a calm about him that was unique given the circumstances of the club."

Bill continued, "I visited Earl and Louise at their home only once, but I was blessed to be part of a large jam session at Sonny Osborne's house that included Earl. He had a subtle and sometimes cutting sense of humor when he was feeling comfortable around musicians and friends, but he was always supportive of everyone around him."

That support extended to other banjo players he might even be on the same bill with. Herb Pedersen related a story to explain: "He and Bobby Thompson were both at a festival somewhere, maybe before they had bluegrass festivals," Herb recalled. "Bobby was



Bill Evans and Larry Cohea at Father's Day Festival in 2011 with the Flatt and Scruggs Tribute Band. CBA File photo.



Keith Little, Vern and Del Williams, 1977. CBA File Photo.



*“Earl Scruggs was unbelievably good, consistent, and true – all wonderful attributes to remember this fine man’s work – and he was a good singer, and a sweet and gracious person, too.”*

– Keith Little

still playing with Jim and Jesse, and he was having trouble with his banjo – I think it was that Ode banjo that he’s always played. He just couldn’t get the sound right for some reason. So he took it over to Earl’s bus and knocked on the door. Josh opened it up.

“Hey Bobby! Do you want to see Earl?” “Yeah!” “Well, c’mon in!”

“So Earl’s sitting at the table in the front of the bus, and Bobby said, ‘Earl, I can’t get this to sound right. I don’t know what the problem is.’

“Oh, OK. So let’s take a look at it!” Earl takes the resonator off and checks the coordinator rods to make sure they are nice and tight. He feels the pressure on the head, and checks the height on the tailpiece, and the bridge. Then he says: ‘Let’s see, everything looks pretty good,’ so he puts the resonator back on.

“Bobby said afterward: ‘and then he started playing my banjo and it sounded just like ‘Foggy Mountain Banjo.’ Bobby just realized sometimes it ain’t the car, it’s the driver.”

As is the case with many innovators, Scruggs would not simply revolutionize the role of the five-string banjo in traditional bluegrass. He later brought the instrument into the electric age, recording with mainstream stars in genres beyond bluegrass and introducing his sound to new audiences. “... just the idea of putting the banjo in an electrified setting, or recording songs with Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, opened up the possibilities of the banjo for all of us younger folks who were listening. There’s no question that Earl’s desire to keep moving forward inspired generations of banjo players, from Tony Trischka to Bela Fleck and beyond,” said Bill Evans.

“I remember one time I was riding in my car to a gig or something, and I turned on the radio listening to what was then called

a country radio station,” recalled High Country’s Larry Cohea in an interview with Dave Berry for “Bluegrass Today” in 2018. “There was this country rock kind of song with a banjo playing back up rolls, nothing crazy, but it was just so good, great tone and rhythm. I was thinking, ‘wow that’s really a great banjo player.’ Then when the song was over they said ‘and that’s the Earl Scruggs Revue,’ from when his sons had the country rock band in the ‘70s.”

The more “progressive” side of Scruggs does not have universal appeal, however. “I love rock ‘n’ roll, but the banjo is most satisfying to me in the acoustic setting. I think the fact that Earl went there is testament to his artistic spirit. Earl was a pioneer,” George Guthrie said.

Regardless, Scruggs’ musical influence has definitely stood the test of time. “I just loved playing like Earl, or as close to it as I could,” said Herb Pedersen. “And I think that [J.D.] Crowe felt too, and Sonny [Osborne], and Alan Shelton. We just loved the sound of the banjo the way he made it sound, and tried desperately to copy it.”

Bill Evans said, “there are so many great aspects of his playing captured in different kinds of songs, from hard-driving instrumentals and vocal songs to his fiddle tune and slow-song back-up.” And Jordan Klein added, “Earl’s ingenuity and originality set so many of us on a completely different trajectory than we’d have been on without him.”

Keith Little captured it all in one short tribute: “Earl Scruggs was unbelievably good, consistent, and true – all wonderful attributes to remember this fine man’s work – and he was a good singer, and a sweet and gracious person, too.”



George Guthrie on banjo with Laurie Lewis & the Right Hands at Crazy J Ranch. Photo by Robin Frenette.

## ★ CALIFORNIA'S ★ FAVORITE EARL TUNES



**TOMMY DRINKARD**  
WATER TOWER

My favorite is probably Cripple Creek because of the tone of the banjo and rhythmic feel.



**BILL EVANS**  
2022 STEVE MARTIN BANJO  
PRIZE WINNER

I think the cut that I continually marvel at is the original recording of “Shucking the Corn.” The banjo sounds as wide as the Grand Canyon on this cut.



**GEORGE GUTHRIE**  
LAURIE LEWIS & THE RIGHT HANDS

“One I really like that is overlooked is “Nashville Blues.” I love the sound of D minor tuning. It’s so spooky and mournful. I love the way Earl plays in alternate tunings like D or drop C.”



**JORDAN KLEIN**  
FRONT COUNTRY, BELLE MONROE  
AND HER BREWGLASS BOYS

“Shuckin’ the Corn” – simple as it is, just I-IV-V-I straight on through – captures the utter fierceness, power and drive of Earl’s playing, as well as the precision and creativity of his up-the-neck technique. What a banger!



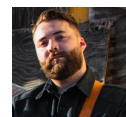
**KEITH LITTLE**  
VERN & RAY, ROSE MADDOX,  
GRANT STREET, HIGH COUNTRY

“Home Sweet Home,” which I personally feel is Earl’s masterpiece rendition (followed very closely by the performance of his own composition, “Ground Speed”).



**HERB PEDERSEN**  
DESERT ROSE BAND, LAUREL CANYON  
RAMBLERS, THE DILLARDS

Probably “Home Sweet Home,” because of the sound of the banjo. For me, I just love the way he did it.



**TYLER STEGALL**  
THE HIGH WATER LINE

For me, it’s Ground Speed. I’ve always felt that it’s one of Earl’s most expressive tunes, and it’s hard to not be in a good mood after playing it.



# “ILLEGAL” BLUEGRASS INSTRUMENTS?

By Joselyn Sky for The Bluegrass Breakdown

I’m not exactly sure when I learned that only certain instruments are allowed in bluegrass music. But when I did, I didn’t question it; I simply accepted it as The Truth. Because it is, isn’t it? Bluegrass is *not* played on the piano or electric guitar for example. Or, is it?

Stumbling upon a video of Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass himself, playing his tune “Ozark Rag” on a (pink!) electric guitar blew my mind. This – along with my own experiments in arranging bluegrass music for my classical harp – made me want to dig around for more. It was actually surprisingly easy to find plenty of

videos of musicians breaking the supposed laws of bluegrass.

Our banjo hero, Earl Scruggs, pushed the boundaries of banjo, exploring what was possible. Earl played way beyond old, familiar tunes like “Cripple Creek,” collaborating with mainstream musicians like The Byrds, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Elton John, and so many more. Earl explained, “I felt that if different types of music could be played on different types of instruments, why not the banjo?” You can see Earl breaking the bluegrass rules for yourself on YouTube; in “Earl Scruggs And Friends – Foggy Mountain Breakdown,” he jams with plenty of illegal instruments including keyboard, drums, and electric guitar. In fact, drums, keyboard and piano appear in most of his albums without Lester Flatt.

While combing through YouTube videos, you can also find Jim and Jesse playing the ‘50s pop hit “Johnny B. Goode.” In fact, Rhonda Vincent, Laurie Lewis, Sam Bush, Molly Tuttle, J.D. Crowe, AJ Lee, and Peter Rowan – and surely many more – have all included illegal bluegrass instruments on some of their albums, while still playing in beautiful bluegrass style. Another boundary-pushing picker who stands out is Ricky Skaggs. While he has many great traditional albums, even Ricky Skaggs can’t resist hot chicken-picking on a telecaster when the time comes – just check out his “Highway 40” live in London from 1985 on YouTube!

Alison Krauss, while also recording many traditional bluegrass albums, made a full album with Robert Plant, breaking so many

rules that while the album is a great one, it can hardly be considered bluegrass. Alison even appeared at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival *a cappella* with Bobby McFerrin doing his human beatbox thing.

Sierra Hull is also a big fan of breaking bluegrass rules. During a recent live performance, not only did she have drums in her (incredible) band, but the guitarist also switched between acoustic and electric. Something about the drums in this setting is definitely pushing the boundaries, even for newgrass. There is also an amazing video of Sierra on YouTube playing “Gold Rush” with a saxophonist (!) in a “Jam In The Van” session.

Recently, a few bluegrass bands have included a cello player in their lineup. This is a fun and interesting way to branch out from the original bluegrass instruments without completely changing the feel of the music the way drums do. It would be so sad to see bluegrass descend into an unrecognizable, unfortunate mess of tasteless commercialism – a fast food of music – like today’s pop music seems to have become. And yet, everything changes; especially the arts, because they are defined

by exploring creativity. On the other hand, bluegrass is literally bluegrass because the traditional sound has been maintained for all these years. At the same time, if there was no change, we would all still be speaking like Shakespeare and playing the lute instead of the mandolin. *Prithee good mistress and sirrah, methinks t’would be folly to talketh just so.*

What about an instrument like classical harp? Being an acoustic string instrument, like cello, perhaps it keeps to the middle road of adding interest without changing the feel of the music too drastically. Unlike cello, however, it does not already have its siblings bass and fiddle in the band. So, what does this mean? Could the “official” range of bluegrass instruments grow? Would bluegrass descend into an unrecognizable sonic Tower of Babel if it did? Many bluegrass musicians, myself included, might have a heart attack if someone set up a keyboard in the middle of a jam – it would almost for sure be a jam buster. However, the world changes, all the time and every day. So, perhaps the question is, how can bluegrass grow and change while still holding on to that grassy sound we all love?



Bill Monroe plays on Redd Volkaert’s guitar.



Earl Scruggs Revue, New and Bold



Earl Scruggs and Friends play Foggy Mountain Breakdown on all the instruments.

Joselyn Sky is a 15-year-old musician who sings, composes, and plays classical harp, bluegrass mandolin, clawhammer banjo, guitar, ukulele, and piano. She writes original material, plays harp, sings—and even yodels—in the bluegrass band “Blue Birds On A Wire,” with members from Central and Northern California. Listen to some bluegrass harp at the QR code here →



Joselyn Sky (center) with her band “Blue Birds on a Wire” backstage at Parkfield, 2023.





Jamming in the lobby at this year's Great 48. Photo by David Cupp.



Chuck Sharp's guitar workshop. Photo by Robin Frenette.

## MUSIC, FUN, AND INSPIRATION START THE YEAR AT GREAT 48

By Sandy DeVera and Jeff Russinsky, Great 48 Planning Team

Bakersfield's Great 48, January 4-7, is the ideal opportunity for those ready to go from closet picking to joining the jam. With amazing jam spaces, workshops, concerts, and masterclasses, there is something for every level of picker, and plenty for folks who just love to listen!

For two hours each Thursday through Saturday, **Mike and Gail Thomas** will offer a **Wernick Method Jam Class** to equip new jammers with the tools to thoroughly enjoy and participate in the jams going on around the clock. We'll even have a Slow Jam space for beginners and shy intermediates to practice in a supportive space all of the jam tips they've learned. Throughout the weekend, scheduled slow jams will focus on old-time, gospel, and bluegrass jamming. And, the room is open to any who wants to "kick off" a slow jam any time there is not another jam scheduled.

Ticketed Master Class workshops on Friday feature banjo instructor extraordinaire, **Bill Evans**, and the incomparable guitarist **Jim Nunally**. Saturday's ticketed masterclass features a special presentation: **"Songs and Stories with Peter Rowan."** We have free workshops Saturday featuring banjo, bass, old-time, twin fiddling, and yodeling.

Friday night's free and open-to-the-public concerts start with an open mic (sign ups open Friday afternoon) followed by **Annie Staninec and John Kael's band "Whisky Deaf,"** and concludes with **"Red Dog Ash."**

Saturday night's ticketed concert at the Buck Owens' Crystal Palace celebrates **Earl Scruggs' 100th birthday** with a one-of-a-kind tribute band including **Bill Evans, Jim Nunally, Mike Witcher, Tom Bekeny, Steve Pottier, and Chad Manning**, with very special guests **Peter Rowan** and **Herb Pedersen**.

The Bakersfield Great 48 always has and always will be, an acoustic music jam event giving roots music fans a chance to start a new year of making music with friends and family. Details on what's planned for the 2024 Great 48 are available on the CBA website's events page. Check out our music association suites and the welcome table for information on bluegrass music offerings throughout 2024!

Scan for more details  
on our Great event!



Warming up for the weekend on the train. CBA file photo.

# Bluegrass Jamming Class

TAUGHT BY

## Mike & Gail Thomas

## Thu-Sat, Jan 4-6

### Great 48 Jam Festival

Bakersfield, CA

Thu 7-9pm  
Fri 10-Noon  
Sat 10-Noon

**Mike & Gail Thomas**

*"Mike and Gail were incredibly experienced and kind."*

*"It turned out to be a great learning experience and fun!"*

\$80 onsite; \$70 advance; or  
\$30 per session; attend any/all

REGISTER NOW!

at [LetsPick.org](https://letspick.org)

Make friends with music, make music with friends!

Help us support musicians  
through injury or illness

Give to the BEAR Fund

Visit [californiabluegrass.org/bear-fund](https://californiabluegrass.org/bear-fund) for details  
or scan code here →



# CBA SWEEPSTAKES RAISES NEARLY \$10K

By The Bluegrass Breakdown

CBA's 2023 Fundraising Sweepstakes put great bluegrass instruments and accessories into eight happy pickers hands, thanks to our wonderful sponsors, and raised nearly \$10,000 to support CBA's portfolio of programs!

A special thanks to sweepstakes sponsors Santa Cruz Guitar Company, Deering Banjo, The Fiddle Mercantile, Ear Trumpet Labs, Peghead Nation, and D'Addario Strings. We couldn't do it without you!

Paul Lawton of Ben Lamond won first prize in the guitar category – a Santa Cruz OM Pre-War model.



CBA Chair Dave Gooding presents Wayne Ginsburg a new Deering Eagle II banjo.

This guitar is understated but powerful, with Indian rosewood sides and back with Sitka spruce top, and honors its pre-WWII predecessors with an advanced X and scalloped top bracing. Second place prize, an Ear Trumpet Lab "Delphina" microphone, went to Nicolas Whitaker of Forestville. This relatively new addition to the Ear Trumpet line is a large-diaphragm condenser microphone with a low profile. Delphina takes the warm, detailed sound and feedback rejection of the standard "Edwina," adding a low-end tuned for accurately capturing acoustic instruments from any distance, just like their "Myrtle" model mic. Frederick Baumeister of Auburn took third prize, and will enjoy a one-year subscription to the Peghead Nation online roots music platform.

In the banjo category, Wayne Ginsburg of Woodland was lucky enough to win both the first prize – the Deering Eagle II banjo – and second prize, a one-year Peghead Nation subscription. The Deering Eagle II sports a unique brass

"twenty ten" tone ring, developed with Jens Kruger of the Kruger Brothers. Third prize, five sets of D'Addario XT Banjo Strings, went to David Ristrim of Whites Creek, Tenn. These strings last longer than traditional strings thanks to a corrosion resistance treatment that also preserves the tone of the strings.

Finally, in the fiddle category, the \$1,000 fiddle outfit from The Fiddle Mercantile went to Teri Grant of Auburn. Katrina Kaiser of Novato won a one-year Peghead Nation subscription. Finally, Jason Heiss of Nevada City won two sets of D'Addario Helicore strings. Helicore strings feature a multi-stranded steel core, making them easily playable while producing a clear, warm tone.

Congratulations to all our sweepstakes winners, and thanks to everyone who participated – all the funds will be put to good use preserving and promoting bluegrass and old-time music!



Teri Grant, winner of The Fiddle Mercantile's \$1000 fiddle outfit.



Santa Cruz Guitar Company founder Richard Hoover presents Paul Lawton (left) a new OM Pre-War model guitar.



## ALL-STAR LINEUP FOR EARL SCRUGGS TRIBUTE CONCERT JAN 6



### TOP PICKERS HONOR SCRUGGS' LEGACY AS PART OF CBA'S 2024 GREAT 48 GATHERING

By Heidi Labensart, Special to The Bluegrass Breakdown

A bluegrass "Big Bang" of sorts occurred on Jan. 6, 1924, when Earl Eugene Scruggs was born on a cotton farm in Cleveland County, N.C. He was 4 when he began playing banjo; by age 10, he started developing the distinctive three-finger picking style that would turn him into a household name and set the course of bluegrass music. Five-string banjo pickers everywhere have since aspired to master "Scruggs-style" playing.

Among those topping the list of Scruggs acolytes is Bill Evans, a 2022 winner of the Freshgrass Foundation's Steve Martin Banjo Prize. Ethnomusicologist Evans, author of the bestselling book, "Banjo for Dummies," will lead an all-star band of esteemed California players in a special 100th-birthday tribute to Scruggs and his longtime partner, Lester Flatt, on Jan. 6, 2024, at Buck Owens' Crystal Palace in Bakersfield. Showtime is 7:30 p.m. The event is part of the 2024 Great

48, a free, four-day gathering featuring jam sessions, workshops, concerts, and showcases, held at the Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center.

The concert, produced by the CBA in partnership with the Guitar Masters concert series, will feature special guests Peter Rowan and Herb Pedersen. Guitarist and mandolinist Rowan started his career in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys, then went on to form and participate in several bands and collaborate with a diverse list of artists in several genres, from David Grisman, Tony Rice, and Clarence White to Jerry Garcia, Flaco Jimenez, and Art of Noise. Guitarist and banjo player Pedersen's list of collaborators is equally long; it includes Chris Hillman, with whom he performed in the Desert Rose Band, as well as Scruggs, Rowan, the Dillards, Gram Parsons, Linda Ronstadt, and Mudcrutch (with Tom Petty).

The tribute band includes Dobro player Mike Witcher, who played in Peter Rowan's Big Twang Theory; guitarist Jim Nunally (the David Grisman Bluegrass Experience; Nell & Jim Band); fiddler Chad Manning (Grisman, Rowan, Laurie Lewis, Tony Trischka); mandolinist Tom Bekeny (Kathy Kallick Band, Rowan, Grisman, Garcia); and bassist Steve Pottier (renowned for his essential recording with Sandy Rothman, "Bluegrass Guitar Duets").

"The night will be filled with stories and remembrances," says CBA Executive Director Pete Ludé. "These players look forward to showing their appreciation for Scruggs' revolutionary contributions to banjo-playing and bluegrass."

Purchase Tickets Here →



Jerry Douglas' 2023 concert at the Crystal Palace. Photo by David Cupp.



# JINGLE BELLS

## AND THE WILDER SIDE OF WINTER

By Jason Dilg, Managing Editor, The Bluegrass Breakdown

Belting out a good round of “Jingle Bells” with friends and family at holiday picking parties a few times over the course of the season is still a good time no matter how you slice it. Even Earl Scruggs recorded it as an instrumental tune, with his sons Randy and Gary, Sam Bush, Ricky Skaggs, and Phil Leadbetter, back in 2009.

But how many of us can get past the first verse of the lyrics? Yeah, us neither. So, with a tip of the hat to author James Lord Pierpont, here are the complete lyrics to the song:

Dashing thro’ the snow,  
In a one-horse open sleigh,  
O’er the hills we go,  
Laughing all the way;  
Bells on bob tail ring,  
Making spirits bright,  
Oh what sport to ride and sing  
A sleighing song to night.

*Jingle bells, Jingle bells,  
Jingle all the way;  
Oh! what joy it is to ride  
In a one horse open sleigh.  
Jingle bells, Jingle bells,  
Jingle all the way;  
Oh! what joy it is to ride  
In a one horse open sleigh.*

A day or two ago,  
I thought I’d take a ride,  
And soon Miss Fannie Bright  
Was seated by my side,  
The horse was lean and lank;  
Misfortune seemed his lot,  
He got into a drifted bank,  
And we, we got upstot.

A day or two ago,  
The story I must tell  
I went out on the snow  
And on my back I fell;

A gent was riding by  
In a one-horse open sleigh,  
He laughed as there I sprawling lie,  
But quickly drove away.

Now the ground is white  
Go it while you’re young,  
Take the girls to night  
And sing this sleighing song;  
Just get a bob tailed bay  
Two forty as his speed.  
Hitch him to an open sleigh  
And crack, you’ll take the lead.

The song was originally titled “The One Horse Open Sleigh,” and describes a time when the “cutter,” a smallish, horse-drawn sleigh, was the metal-studded-tire equipped car of it’s day – the song was first published in 1857 – and like its wheeled relative, served many roles: keeping businesses on track when roads in the Northeastern U.S. became otherwise impassible in the winter; serving as a getaway vehicle, of sorts, for courting couples; and, when hitched to the finest and fastest steeds, became hot-rod racers. And the snow-packed roads around Boston, Mass., where James lived for a time, were



Currier and Ives' 1870 hand-colored lithograph "A Spill Out' On The Snow," –

the perfect surfaces for organized and spontaneous races throughout the winter months.

The bells of interstellar jingling fame – the song was the first in space, at least until the government’s UFO program tells us differently – were tied to the horse’s tails to help warn others of the sled’s approach, and the tails were tied in bobs to help keep them from getting tangled in the gear. “The best horses for sleigh racing were lean of body, bred not for the speed of their gallop but of their trot,” noted Equestrian Culture Magazine’s December 2018 issue. “A horse that could trot ‘two forty’ like the bobtailed bay referenced in ‘Jingle Bells’ could cover a mile in two minutes and 40 seconds – a speedy trot indeed!”

The New England Historical Society goes as far as to say in a website post that the song was, for its time, “the equivalent of a Beach Boys song about fast cars, pretty girls, and sneaking off to be together in private. It might even be a drinking song, as Medford had a flourishing rum-making

industry. Pierpont was also known to imbibe.” Which makes the con-trived rhyming word “upsot” even more fun: perhaps it wasn’t so much bound to cosmic misfortune as much as the driver was drunk – a “sot.”

Another fun fact about the author, James Lord Pierpont: five years earlier, he penned “The Return’d Californian,” recalling his failed ventures in San Francisco during the Gold Rush. The NEHS website also notes: “He left his wife and children behind in Massachusetts with his parents in 1849 and set up shop as a daguerreotype artist in San Francisco,” continuing: “Unfortunately, Pierpont lost everything in a fire in May of 1851.”

Now you won’t just know all the words to this Yuletide favorite, but you’ll have some fun trivia to use as a distraction around the food table while you get the last of the cranberry sauce. Merry Christmas from all of us at the Breakdown!



CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION



JOIN US IN JULIAN! MAY 1-5, 2024

The Julian Family Fiddle Camp is a five-day acoustic music camp for people of all ages and musical abilities. Featuring instruction on fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin, vocals, and bass. JFFC is held annually at a rural family retreat center near the historic mining town of Julian, and features some of the best internationally renowned instructors and performers on the roots music scene. All meals, instruction and evening concerts are provided for a single fee.



CAMP INSTRUCTORS

Vickie Vaughn - Bass  
Nina Weisman - Mandolin  
Luke Price - Artist at Large  
Rachel Price - Vocals  
Nat Copland - Fiddle  
Mike Compton - Mandolin  
Joe Newberry - Guitar/Songwriting  
Catherine “BB” Bowness - Banjo  
Joseph Decosimo - Clawhammer Banjo  
Karen Heil - Old-Time Fiddle  
Grant Gordy - Guitar Soloing



# SOUTH STATE 48

'I could listen to this all day!'



Wild Blue Yonder at the Windmill Cafe.  
Photo by Robin Frenette.



A fiddle jam breaks out in the courtyard.  
Photo by Robin Frenette.



All-night jams at the Honey Buckets' Base Camp. Photo by Robin Frenette



Music could be heard all across the hotel grounds over the weekend. Photo by David Cupp

By Donna Hargis, CBA SoCal Regional Director and South State 48 Organizer

There were a lot of happy pickers at the South State 48 over the weekend of November 3rd through 5th in Carlsbad, California. We've created a fun jamming festival that brought people together from far and wide to connect and pick bluegrass, and it is a wonderful thing to see. All ages and all skill levels joined together in a grassy courtyard under a beautiful blue sky, then picked long into the night.

We saw a lot of familiar faces – and a lot of first-timers as well! Anni Beach, the band leader of Jam Pak, came out with a bus full of teens and instruments, which meant music and love came too. Some of the kids performed as "Fair Black Rose," and all of them picked in jams. Anni is an inspiration and embodies the true spirit of bluegrass community.

Here's what Anni had to say about South State 48; "I have not attended a gathering that was mainly dedicated to jamming. I found it very refreshing and fun to just be around everyone who was playing their instruments. I really liked the jams which were led by various groups. It was so well organized. The setting is perfect with a food court, grass, beautiful rooms, and workshops. Our Arizona people all loved the format."

Youngsters Henry Strid, Joselyn Sky, and Charlie and Hank Hanson performed as "Wild Blue Yonder," and blew our hair back with their picking. The energy in that room was amazing! Those in attendance knew they were witnessing up-and-coming stars in the bluegrass scene, and we couldn't be more proud of them.



Photo by Robin Frenette.

The "big boys" – Honey Buckets and Rose Valley Thorns – both delighted their audiences with their rapid fire pickin' and gorgeous harmonies. There were unique workshops too, including one about using a single mic. I wish everyone could have attended "Bluegrass 101," where three members of Bluegrass Holiday were joined by Kyle Dunkin and Charleetta Erb, who demonstrated "what makes it bluegrass." Harmony singing, bass, guitar, music business, and how to grow bluegrass were among the other topics.

But the jamming is what really stood out to most folks. Everyone had their own unique experience, but if you walked around the courtyard or up to some of the open rooms, you got to experience some amazing bluegrass. Roger Taylor of the San Diego Bluegrass Society said this was his favorite part of vol III: hearing folks of all skill levels – from the novice, to the pro – in one place, picking bluegrass.

If success is measured in smiles, South State 48 nailed it. But I'd like to share what I heard from someone outside of our genre, the woman working the front desk who said to me as I left; "I could listen to this all day."

"The music?" I asked.

"No, I didn't get to hear any music. I'm talking about the passion. Hearing all these people talking so passionately about something, all talking about the next time they'd see each other and do it again. I could listen to that all day."

"Me too," I answered, "Me too. See you next year!"



Fearless Jam Pak leader, Anni Beach.  
Photo by David Cupp.



Rose Valley Thorns with special guests.  
Photo by Robin Frenette.



Gazebo jam. Photo by David Cupp.



Fair Black Rose perform at the Windmill Cafe. Photo by David Cupp.



# March 1,2,3 2024 Lake Havasu City AZ

Advance Weekend Ticket

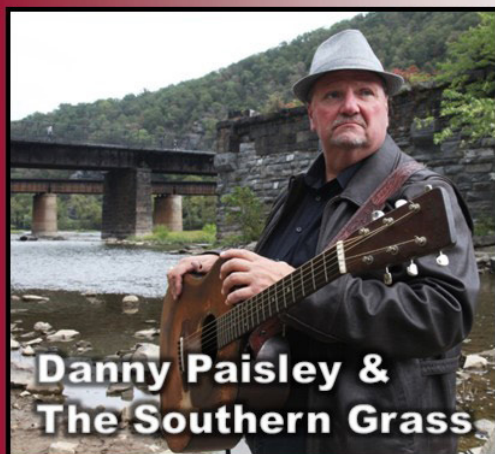
**\$110** Includes tax



**Crying Uncle**



Lake Havasu State Park  
699 London Bridge Road  
HWY 95 & Industrial Blvd



**Danny Paisley &  
The Southern Grass**



**Becky  
Buller  
Band**



**Kenny  
Ray  
Horton**

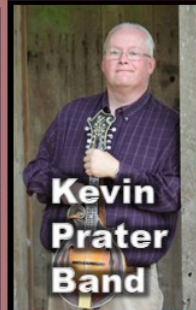


**EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

**ETSU Bluegrass Band**



**Valerie Smith Band**



**Kevin  
Prater  
Band**



**MONROE  
CROSSING**



**Little Roy and Lizzy Show**

*\*Chair Policy\* Set Up Anytime  
Starting Tues 12pm Noon*



**Lorraine Jordan &  
Carolina Road**

Proudly Brought To You By *Danny Stewart's Productions LLC*

*Sound By Paul Knight*

Early Camping Opens Monday Feb 26 \* Set Up Your Own Chairs In Audience Area Beginning Tues 12noon \* Food, Beverage, Craft Vendors  
\* Workshops \* Thurs Night Movie \* Jamming \* Walking Trails \* Music Daily 10am \* **NO SMOKING IN CONCERT AREA** \* **NO OUT-  
SIDE ALCOHOL/COOLERS ALLOWED IN AUDIENCE/VENDOR AREA, FRIENDLY PETS WELCOME in PET Concert Area**  
**Camping with Weekend Ticket Only, (No Camping with a Day Pass) WALK IN GATE WILL CLOSE AT MIDNIGHT**  
In Dry Camping Area. Quite Generators are welcome between 7am-10pm (For Safety Concerns **must** have a exhaust stack if attached to RV)  
Note: RV GATE OPENS at 9am CLOSES at 8pm, everyday. (all campers must be park by then, or wait till next morning at gate lot)  
Thursday Movie and Visiting is for weekend tickets holders only

Day Tickets are for Sale in Advance (credit card) or at the Gate (cash or check)  
Fri \$25, Sat \$30, Sun \$25 (includes tax) Children 13-17 1/2 off. Under 12 Free  
For more info or to buy tickets, PLEASE GO TO THE WEBSITE! (Below)  
Contact Danny Stewart at mandolindan2005@yahoo.com 570-721-2760

Tickets On Sale at:  
[www.BluegrassOnTheBeach.com](http://www.BluegrassOnTheBeach.com)  
[www.LakeHavasuBluegrass.com](http://www.LakeHavasuBluegrass.com)

**[www.BluegrassOnTheBeach.com](http://www.BluegrassOnTheBeach.com)**





## Have you renewed your CBA membership? Rates increase in 2024!

CBA Membership dues haven't seen a hike in 17 years, and the Board has decided that rates will need to increase starting in January.

Here's your chance to RENEW NOW at the current rates: \$25 for individuals or \$30 for families. You can even lock in this rate for up to five years, at a discount!

### RENEW NOW

## CBA MEMBERSHIP RATES

INDIVIDUAL	FAMILY
ANNUAL • \$25	ANNUAL • \$30
3-YEAR • \$65	3-YEAR • \$80
5-YEAR • \$110	5-YEAR • \$130

[CALIFORNIABLUEGRASS.ORG/CBA-MEMBERSHIP](http://CALIFORNIABLUEGRASS.ORG/CBA-MEMBERSHIP)



## CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF EARL SCRUGGS

AND HIS IMPACT ON CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS

BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN  
CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION  
3739 BALBOA STREET, #5090  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94121-2605

CHANGE SERVICE  
REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US PSTG PAID  
PERMIT NO 1831  
WEST SAC, CA



## NEW! CBA GIFT MEMBERSHIPS

Purchasing a gift membership to CBA has never been easier thanks to the dedication of our volunteer member database wiz Debbie Wendt.

With a simple scan of a QR code, you'll be magically escorted to your very own private page where you can connect your loved one – now or future – with a community of music across the state and beyond. With discounts to picking supplies and a year of the Bluegrass Breakdown, this one is a slam-dunk!



## Monthly Trivia Quiz

By Bert Daniel, Breakdown Contributor

Back in October, our question highlighted two current western bluegrass festivals small enough that you can hear all the music from your campsite – even if you don't bring your chair to the stage (as you should). One features views of a snow-capped volcano and the other takes place in a location that somehow ended up five miles north of a town it had been five miles south of before the railroad came. We asked you to name the festivals.

But something happened – something rarer than a baguette (the instrumental version of a turducken: a mandolin stuffed into a guitar stuffed into a bass!) Apparently, CBA members were having too much fun at the Fall Campout to be bothered with responding with the Lost River Festival in Merrill, Ore., and the Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival in Tres Pinos. Score one for the trivia master!

## DECEMBER TRIVIA CHALLENGE

For this month's banjo-centric tribute to the inimitable Earl Scruggs, we offer the following banjo-centric trivia question: "One of the characters in this recent novel is an African American banjo player with a dog named 'Hazel Dickens.' Can you name the award winning novel?"

Send your banjo-centric answer to:

[trivia@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:trivia@californiabluegrass.net)

no later than December 31.

This month's banjo-centric prize is a hat from the Deering Banjo Company! 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 February 2024 issue of the Bluegrass Breakdown.



Good Old Fashioned Bluegrass Festival. Photo by Robin Frenette.