



How a Kitchen-Table Newsletter Spawned CBA's Regional Directors

by the Bluegrass Breakdown

In a small Sacramento kitchen one evening in 1992, Bob Thomas and his wife put a stack of paper on the kitchen table. Each sheet in the pile was identical, with the latest area music news printed on both sides. They folded each single sheet by hand, licked the stamps, and drove them to the post office. That double-sided circular, *Sacramento Area Bluegrass News*, was never fancy, but it carried a big idea: bluegrass lovers could organize themselves, right where they lived.



Bob and Cindy Thomas in 2007.
Photo by Steve Tilden.

Bob said his first event was a potluck picnic in the park. He invited anyone with an instrument to join in the fun. Folks ate, swapped songs, and, before they went home, wrote their mailing addresses on Bob's yellow legal pad. That created the list of folks to be in-

the-know about the Thursday jams at John Green's Fifth String Music Store, band gigs, and monthly jams at homes or other places in the Sacramento area.

As the newsletter began to grow—and cost real money—Bob tucked a one-line ask at the bottom: "If you like this, send a dollar." The envelopes came back with singles and fives. "Man, I was in hog heaven," he laughed. The lesson stuck: if you give bluegrassers a place to meet, they'll help foot the bill.

Running concerts required a bit more than just stamps—like insurance. Bob asked the CBA board for help. The arrangement they struck created CBA's first "area vice president," the forerunner to today's regional directors, and CBA covered Bob's Sacramento-area events under its policy. A few months later he rented a cinder-block gym, hung four small speakers at the corners of the audience—sound wizard Paul Knight's clever fix for the echo in an otherwise difficult room to mix—and presented the Nashville Bluegrass Band on January 16, 1994. A local Placerville group opened the show, setting another convention of

Bob's success: every national headliner would be paired with a California act.

For 13 years, Bob juggled concerts, monthly open jams, and the newsletter. When email arrived, his list ballooned to 600 names, and new editors—Nancy Patrilla, Larry Kuhn,



Bob Thomas (left) and Larry Kuhn (right) raffle a banjo in 2007.

and John Hettinger—kept it moving. Bob also produced *Hand-Picked*, a compilation CD of 10 California bands, drop-shipped just-in-time to the CBA suite in the Galt House hotel for the 2001 IBMA convention. The goal was simple: hand strangers a disc and say, "This is what California sounds like." The supply was gone before the week was out.

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DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

OLD-TIME MUSIC

by Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director

I started as a bluegrass fan and didn't immediately understand old-time music. That's the theme of this month's issue, so I guess I should come clean.

When I first became passionate about bluegrass in the early 1980's, supergroups like the Bluegrass Album Band and Hot Rize were wowing audiences. First-gen pioneers, including Ralph Stanley, Bill Monroe, Jim & Jesse, and the Osborne Brothers, were still touring. Innovators like Bill Keith, Alison Krauss, Tony Trishka, Bela Fleck, Tony Rice, and David Grisman were redefining bluegrass. These were exciting times!

And then there was the old-time crowd. I remember noticing old-time songs often had the same two or three chords, but also a habit of occasionally dropping six-beat measures in surprising places, just to fool you. There were many unfamiliar fiddle tunes with odd names—"Possum up a Gum Stump?!"—which often

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PIER JAMS TO PORCH PARTIES L.A.'S OLD-TIME LEGACY

by Phoebe Leigh-Suelflow, CBA Board Treasurer and Vice President, Volunteers

When you think of the Los Angeles music scene, old-time music may not be the first thing that comes to mind. However the Southland has a fun—and sometimes funny—history of old-time music. L.A. has long been a crossroads for musicians, and its old-time scene has grown from roots transplanted from other regions to become a glorious living thing in its own right.

'SPEAKING' WITH MANY ACCENTS

People have been coming to California for our sunshine and job opportunities for generations. As

long as there have been people with fiddles and banjos, there has been old-time music in the Southland.

Gwen Koyanagi's family came to Los Angeles from Hawaii. Gwen's mother had given her a violin, but they couldn't afford lessons. So in the early 1970s, teenage Gwen went down to the old wooden pier in Redondo Beach to listen to the street musicians. The one who played the old frailing style of banjo intrigued Gwen the most. She brought her violin and joined him in playing tunes. When they attended a banjo and fiddle festival in nearby Long

Beach, they found a flyer for a group of old-time fiddlers that met in nearby Signal Hill Park twice a month.

Gwen began going to those gatherings. She was in high school, and one of the few young players in the group. Most of the fiddlers were "old men" from Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and even a man from Canada who lived out of his camper. One man played fiddle on his chest bone. He sawed with the bow and would twirl the fiddle to change strings when he played. His music had a strong beat

and a sweet wailing sound. Gwen recalls that "he was scary looking, with wrinkles that looked like dried mud when it cracked." He wouldn't talk. He would walk over to Gwen, play a riff, growl, and walk away. At first, Gwen wasn't sure what this meant. Then she brought a tape recorder, recorded what he played, and learned it when she got back home. The next time he came over, she played the riff back to him. He looked surprised, smiled and howled, "Well my name is Bob Rogers! Glad to meet you!"

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BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

August 2025 – Old-Time Music

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.

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WELCOME MESSAGE

cont'd from front page

seemed so esoteric, and sometimes unfamiliar to even seasoned jam participants. Yet, "no prob, just run it by me one time and I'll be fine." Players were often seated rather than standing in a circle. Nobody really took "breaks," they just played in unison. They just seemed to be locked in meditation, and having a lot of fun!

Some years ago my daughter, raised as a bluegrass fan, provided some insight. Late one night, while I was editing videos of an old-time band in my home office, Helen came by and listened for a while. "This old-time stuff is such happy music," she said. I think that helped me understand. It just makes you feel good. It's more rooted in dance. It doesn't need a high lonesome sound, nor lyrics about loss. It's just happy.

When CBA was founded 50 years ago, our charter clearly distinguished between the two genres—bluegrass and old-time (as well as bluegrass gospel)—and now I better understand why. Bluegrass and old-time are two unique gems. Our square-dance events with old-time

music at the Father's Day Festival, Feral Friday in San Francisco, and elsewhere are more popular than ever.

We're celebrating this legacy in this month's issue. You'll find features on the pioneering Any Old Time Stringband, Carl Pagter's Country Ham, the 1970's scene in Southern California and much more. In addition—spoiler alert!—the best old-time event in California all year is coming up in just a few weeks: CBA's **Golden Old-time Campout** at the Russian River in Sonoma County, August 21-24. With some of the best music, most friendly people, and best community in the most beautiful part of California. You definitely won't want to miss it.

I should also remind you that we're looking for **new board members**. The nominee deadline is August 15, so this is your chance to be part of the solution. You should also mark out October 13-19 for our **Fall Campout** in Lodi (with the annual membership meeting Saturday, October 18) and **South State 48 Volume V** in Carlsbad, November 6-9. I look forward to seeing you in person at these events! 🐾

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SAVE THE DATE FOR GREAT 48!

BLUEGRASS JAM RETURNS TO BAKERSFIELD: JANUARY 15-18, 2026

by Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director

It's not too early to start planning for 2026! Our favorite way to kick off the new year is at the Great 48 Bluegrass Jam, returning to the Bakersfield Marriott hotel Thursday, January 15 through Sunday, January 18. This four-day event is packed with hosted and free-form jams, instructional workshops, open mics, and performances.

Room reservations will open on September 1 for CBA members (as well as current members of other represented bluegrass associations), and September 15 for the general public. Find the code for the discounted CBA room rate on our website [CaliforniaBluegrass.org/cbaevent/great48](https://californiabluegrass.org/cbaevent/great48). Mark your calendar—rooms typically sell out quickly!

NEW! ALL-ACCESS PASS

The Great 48 Jam has been free, with CBA paying the bills through sponsorships and donations. But with higher costs for facilities and insurance, and considering our mission to support performers

and instructors fairly, we're asking attendees to purchase an all-access pass. The full event is \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members, to access all of the hosted jams, open mic shows, performances, master class sessions, and other activities. The pass will be available on-line starting September 1, and on-site at the event.

JAM CLASSES RETURN

Gail and Mike Thomas will be back with their very popular Wernick Method jam class. This three-hour class will be offered at four separate times between Thursday and Saturday. Class size is restricted to a maximum of 12 participants per session. Tuition is \$60 for the class, and can be purchased online in advance, or at the event (unless it's sold out).

Plan now to kick off the new year in the most fun way possible—with friends and music!



Jamming with Chad Manning. Photo by David Cupp.



More info and tickets
for Great 48 here →



Tunes on the patio. Photo by David Cupp.

★ GET TO GOTCO ★

Golden Old-Time Campout Returns to Guerneville

There's a joke in old-time circles: "What's the difference between an old-time and a bluegrass jam?" "In bluegrass, everyone knows the tune before you start."

With no solos and everyone playing together at the same time, players are welcome to jump into an open jam and pick up tunes on the fly. Considering old time's vast repertoire—often with multiple versions of tunes sharing the same name—this convention makes joining the fun at the Golden Old Time Campout a great entry-point for bluegrassers looking to hop in.

And if you need more encouragement to make it to the GOTCO August 21-24, 2025 at Camp Russian River in Guerneville, we offer 10 crossover tunes you can play that old-timers will recognize!

TEN CROSSOVER TUNES

Mississippi Sawyer
June Apple
Soldiers Joy
Eighth of January
Bill Cheatham
Sandy Boys
Hop High Ladies
John Hardy
Cripple Creek
Arkansas Traveller



Jamming in the campground at last year's GOTCO. Photo by Alan Bond.

RUN FOR THE CBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CBA elects new members to our board of directors each year. Interested candidates are invited to submit a petition signed by 10 CBA members by August 15. Results of the election will be announced at the annual membership meeting in October.

For info, visit
[californiabluegrass.org/
cba-board](https://californiabluegrass.org/cba-board).



COUNTRY HAM

THE PAGTERS' PICKIN' PARTY REMEMBERED

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

When the California Bluegrass Association launched in 1974, member #1, Carl Pagter, was already imagining a band that would capture the front-porch spirit of the music he cherished. A year later, while shuttling between Kaiser Industries' legal office in Washington, D.C. and his home base in Walnut Creek, he and his wife Judie Cox Pagter christened that dream "Country Ham"—a name as homespun as the sound they made.

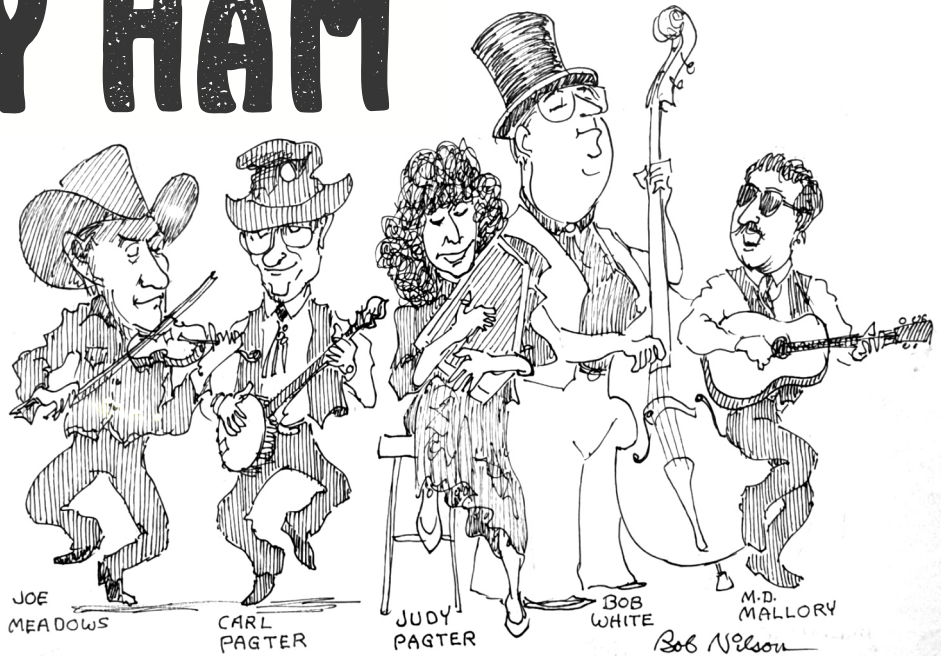
The band grew out of Carl's earlier Spout Run String Band and was very much a family affair. Carl played clawhammer banjo and lead vocals; Judie added guitar, autoharp, and high-lonesome harmonies. Various players rounded out the core, including West Virginia fiddle great Joe Meadows (later joined on occasion by then-U.S. Senator Robert Byrd, also a fiddler himself), guitarist Paul Reed, fiddler Jerry Lundy, and bassist Bob White.

Because Kaiser kept Carl, its director of government affairs, posted in the nation's capital, the Pagters lived what Carl jokingly called a "bi-coastal bluegrass commute," spending part of each year at Judie's family farm near Barboursville, Virginia, and the rest in California. That arrangement let Country Ham straddle two vibrant scenes: D.C.'s red-hot string-band circuit and the CBA's fast-growing West Coast community.

Between 1976 and 2008, the band recorded a whopping 17 albums, most for Cincinnati-based Vetco Records. The debut *Old Time Mountain Music* (1976) captured their front-porch authenticity. *Music for Clogging* (1982) became a favorite of dance callers. And gospel-leaning work like *Anchored in Love* (1988) revealed the Pagters' affection for the Carter Family and early country hymns. Later self-released projects, *Carpenter's Mill* and *The Old Cane Press* (both 1998), show the group was still exploring mountain fiddle tunes and sentimental ballads three decades in.

While none of those LPs cracked *Billboard's* charts, they sold steadily at festivals and through the *Bluegrass Breakdown* classifieds, becoming informal primers for would-be old-time pickers across California.

Unlike many garage-to-festival outfits of the era, Country Ham never worried about gas money or motel bills. Carl's day job as a corporate attorney, and later as Kaiser Cement's general counsel, meant he could underwrite plane tickets, studio time, and even the occasional bus rental when the band shared a bill with flashier acts back East. Friends recall him



Bob Nilson's drawing of Country Ham performing at the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival, on display at the CBA 50th Anniversary Pavilion at the 2025 Father's Day Festival.

framing the support as simply "taking care of the details so the music could happen." That quiet patronage mirrored the way he personally backed early CBA outreach trips to the International Bluegrass Music Association's *World of Bluegrass*, ensuring California artists had a stage at the event in Owensboro and later Louisville.

No one mistook Country Ham for a pyrotechnic showpiece. Carl's banjo rolled along at a relaxed clip; Judie's rhythm guitar gave Joe Meadows' longbow fiddle plenty of breathing room. But what the band lacked in breakneck chops they delivered tenfold in approachability. Sets were sprinkled with corny jokes, impromptu waltz lessons, and gospel duets inviting audiences to sing along. Long-time CBA member Bruno Brandli summed up their appeal: "Their show made you think 'I could do this. I could learn to play an instrument and sing some songs with my family and friends.'" That spark—seeing amateurs in the truest sense of the word having big-time fun—helped seed scores of living-room jam circles up and down the coast.

Country Ham became a fixture at the CBA Father's Day Bluegrass Festival, sharing 2000 and 2005 line-ups with the likes of J.D. Crowe & the New South, Doyle Lawson, and Rhonda Vincent. They were regulars at the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival in Brunswick, Maine, as well as at D.C.'s Red Fox Inn, Virginia's Tennessee Fall Homecoming, and the Birchmere's old location on Mt. Vernon Ave. in Alexandria, Virginia. The band's 1979 Vetco release *Where the Mountain Laurel Blooms* even earned a spot on the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center's sound archive, a nod to Carl's passion for preserving source material intact.

By embodying the "anyone-can-join" ethos, Country Ham functioned less as a star vehicle and more as a gateway for budding musicians who may have felt bluegrass was out of their

reach. Young pickers who wore out the group's vinyl in the '80s turned up as main-stage artists in Grass Valley by the 2000s. Meanwhile, Carl's insistence on authenticity—he once drove overnight to return a borrowed fretless banjo to its North Carolina elder owner—modeled the kind of respect for tradition that remains the CBA's cultural bedrock.

As our association marks its golden anniversary, revisiting Country Ham reminds us that technical brilliance isn't the only path to listeners' hearts. A good-natured lawyer with a battered leather hat, a box of LPs, and a willingness to pick up the tab proved that mountain music can feel like home, whether you're in a basement jam in Virginia or under the pines at Grass Valley. That legacy of access, hospitality, and joyful noise is woven into every festival workshop and campground jam circle the CBA hosts today.

So spin *Old Time Mountain Music* again, laugh at the shaggy jokes, and remember: if Country Ham could make a roomful of strangers believe they too could pick "Whiskey Before Breakfast," there's no reason CBA's next 50 years can't be just as welcoming—and just as much fun. 🐾

Listen to *Old Time Mountain Music* in its entirety on YouTube!



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Evie Ladin. Photo by Snap Jackson.

In the midst of this summer's festivals and fiddlers conventions, I caught up with Oakland's Evie Ladin to talk about her experience as an old-time clawhammer banjo player, step dancer, and "body music" performer.

Let's start with your relationship to the banjo. How did you get started playing clawhammer banjo?

I remember John Cohen (New Lost City Ramblers, etc.) sitting on our couch saying "you girls should play the banjo!" He took my sister Abby and me to buy our first banjos, and we started taking lessons with a young Bob Carlin who lived nearby with his parents. I was 8.

Your parents hosted traveling musicians in your house when you were a kid. Can you share a formative memory from that unofficial folk music salon?

So many memories—including teenage embarrassment at having cloggers living in our basement or hanging out on the porch when I'd come home from school. Now I'm honored to have all these amazing people tell me "I stayed at your house!" One memory: when North Carolina's preeminent dance team, the Green Grass Cloggers, stayed with us, they went out to get bagels and asked for a dozen assorted bagels, only to find out that due to their accent, they returned with a dozen "all-salted" bagels!

How did dance and body percussion make its way into your repertoire?

My mom was an international folk dance leader in New York City, and we were around her teaching and leading workshops; and my dad always loved social dance, so it was part of what our family did. I remember standing behind my mom taking a clogging workshop when I was about 5. There were a lot of clogging groups at that time, and my sister and I were always bugging people to show

EVIE LADIN

A BODY OF MUSIC AND DANCE

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

us steps. My mom sewed us calico clogging outfits, and we started making up routines. Percussive dance was definitely my first love. As for body percussion, African-American hambone is part of the Appalachian tradition, and I was first introduced to it at a camp at the Ashokan Center, where I turned my legs black-and-blue practicing. In my years performing with Rhythm In Shoes we investigated more creative, contemporary choreographies with tradition as a jumping-off place.

You created an African studies/dance major at Brown University. Did becoming more familiar with West African polyrhythms change your approach to Appalachian clawhammer?

Introduced to Ghanaian polyrhythms as a teenager, a lightbulb went off that they were foundational in clawhammer syncopations and clogging steps, and I dove deeper into African studies and the African roots of Appalachian culture. That study, and also growing up in a majority Black city and school in Baltimore at the dawn of hip-hop definitely influenced the funk I express in my clawhammer playing.

You mentioned that you were in a serious car accident when you were ... I think you said 20? How did that change your performance trajectory?

I spent my senior year of college dancing with a full-leg cast, and with no advocate in the hospital, the doctor reassembled my broken leg a full inch shorter. It continues to affect me structurally, especially as I age. Though I spent my 20s in a professional percussive dance company, I had to stop because I didn't have all the articulation I needed, and experienced a lot of numbness. As is consistent with a fairly tumultuous upbringing, I kept adapting, figuring out how to work with what I can do physically, including keeping my body strong and able. The great thing about body music is that like the old hoofers, I can do that well into old age.

After college, you were awarded a Fulbright scholarship and spent a year in Nigeria studying dance. What parallels did you find between West African body-music traditions and Appalachian ones, like hambone?

The connections came more in the footwork than body percussion. For independent study during my semester abroad I was embedded with an Ibo dance group, but for days the dancing didn't happen—and I was anxious to start. One night a storm and power outage forced us inside, and I stood up and said "let me show you what I do,"

and started clogging. After five seconds, they jumped up and said "this is how we dance," and started doing what we call "chugs"—and it went from there. Their dances had some tricky footwork I was able to pick up, and I performed with them at every opportunity. Later in my Fulbright year, I studied and performed with three groups: Ibo, Benin, and Tiv. It was an incredible experience, and they were happy to have me because the novelty of having a white dancer got them more "dashes" (money). I did choreograph some body music for them, and they turned it into their own style in a really cool way. The interchange was amazing.

Many people picture flatfooting or clogging as a niche folk dance style. What is flatfoot dance, and how does it function as a rhythm instrument in your shows?

Flatfoot dance is the percussion in string-band music, and often conforms more to the melody than the rhythm section. Clogging, flatfooting, buck dancing, jigging—names and styles are often regional, and there are no clear lines. Flatfooting, as you might expect, tends to be closer to the floor, and all of these styles reflect the unique mix of Black, Native American, and Anglo cultural traits. Whether holding down a steady pulse under a song, or taking a rhythm break with my feet, it's always an exciting part of any performance.



Evie Ladin Band. Photo by Gudmundur Vigfusson



Evie's dancing feet. Photo courtesy Evie Ladin.

You co-direct the International Body Music Festival. What is “body music,” and why do you think audiences respond so strongly to rhythm created without instruments? What have you learned about translating traditional rhythms across cultures?

While I came to body music initially from this culture-specific vantage, my partner Keith Terry's style rose from his training as a jazz drummer and he is a real pioneer in creating the genre. That said, body music exists all over the world—and he coined the term because it includes melody and harmony, not only percussion. I've found unequivocally that with nothing between you and the audience, who all have basically the same instrument, people respond viscerally to the artform. It's tactile, kinesthetic, creative, both traditional and contemporary in presentation, and so powerful in both execution and experience. Working internationally, artists have told me they didn't know there was any traditional American culture, and it's gratifying to educate people on the rich arts that came from that unique intersection of cultures. From adversity often rises great art.

You now call Oakland home, after growing up on the East Coast. What drew you as an Appalachian roots musician to California, and how has the Bay Area shaped your sound, or not?

I came to California because my partner already had kids in the Bay Area, and I followed my heart. Almost immediately I fell into a thriving old time/roots music scene, a band (Stairwell Sisters), Keith's world-music ensemble and intercultural collaborations (Crosspulse), teaching and performing, and life just flowed from there. It took some time to get used to the West Coast, and didn't find the percussive dance scene I desired—but music and songwriting gained traction, and as usual, I adapted. The diversity of Oakland reminded me a lot of Baltimore, and I loved the opportunities to continue authentically reconnecting Appalachian culture with other African-diaspora traditions. I enjoy both being deep in the Appalachian culture I grew up around, as well as connecting it with many other cultural traditions that are thriving in the Bay Area. The Bay Area has always been known for both its diversity and creative experimentation and that environment is very fulfilling.

How would you describe the mix of banjo, voice, and percussive dance that defines an Evie Ladin

Band performance to someone who's never seen one of your shows?

From countless audience testimonials, I know the mix of what we do both in my band and solo is unusually entertaining—storytelling, a blend of traditional and original material, humor and deep emotion that is shared freely with the audience, interesting arrangements, sweet harmonies, skilled playing—and the percussive dance that always gets people fired up. Like the experience with body music shows, it's hard to explain ahead of time the personal impact our shows appear to have. I just honestly create a shared experience with an audience. The most common comment I get is “I had no idea how moving and entertaining this would be!” I've come to accept that you just have to experience us to know. We seem to defy genre description, but everyone has a great time. We've got deep roots, and it shows.

You've toured nearly every U.S. state and multiple continents; which audience surprised you most, and why?

I think it's usually the other way around, that audiences are surprised by the unusual authenticity of our shows—but perhaps when the Stairwell Sisters first toured Scotland, the audiences were so polite during the show we thought they hated us. Come to find out that Scottish artists apparently expected quiet respect during performances—because after the shows the effusive positive comments contradicted our stage experience!

Your latest album was recorded live. What elements of an on-stage environment do you wish studio records could capture more often, if any?

Gaining my professional training as a dancer, I am, first and foremost, a live performer. That's my real strength, and challenging to carry into the studio. It's a chemical thing—in live performance, adrenaline is up, there's the electric exchange with the audience, and that's where my art comes to life. I don't know if I adequately translate that energy in the studio. I've commiserated with other artists that people don't seem to like live albums as much, while performers feel it more authentically captures the juice! There's always that conundrum between representing what people hear in concert, or letting the songs take the lead and find their own expansive sound that you might not produce live. I've not figured that out, but I do know the stage is where my art really comes alive.

You took home a ribbon in the dance contest at this year's Mount Airy Fiddlers Convention. Why is that festival considered a “source” event, and what does winning there mean to you personally?

Mount Airy is at the heart of the Round Peak style that has influenced so many, due to the generosity of the generation of players from the area who taught so many outsiders and brought them into the music. The culture is so deep there, bluegrass and old-time so closely related, and for years it seemed like you wouldn't win any ribbons if you weren't in the Mount Airy phone book! To be recognized there really feels special. Though I grew up with the traditions, I am not Appalachian by

birth, so to get that validation is very special. It's not really a big deal, but also a total honor. It seems the farther you get from the source, the more people hold tightly to “authenticity,” while at the source, people love that the tradition is alive and well, embracing a wider scope, which is definitely where I live, deeply in and outside the box.

Looking ahead, what collaboration or experiment is currently sitting on your creative bucket list—and why?

My child has grown, so I am moving more freely—touring quite a lot and taking advantage of opportunities in new communities. That freedom is exciting, and given the current state of the world, feels like I've got to do it while I can. I've started doing a winter performance season with MoToR/dance, my body music choir, overtly reconnecting African-diaspora polyrhythms with Appalachian songs in new choreographies that have gotten a really strong response. It's an interesting creative outlet. I'm starting to collaborate with younger musicians, after a lifetime of being “the kid” in the room—and honestly, feeling very open to new inspiration and ideas.

What did we not cover that you think is important for readers to understand about you and your artistic expression?

As a working artist, I think it's important to stay flexible and diverse with what you are able to offer, or how you engage with your audience. Somehow, without ever having much support within the industry, I have a very interesting and solid career that intersects with a range of communities in very fulfilling ways, as a performer, educator, or dance caller! I realized years ago that my acts of service include facilitating participation in communal, social music and dance the way I was raised and the way most humans have interacted before now. This CBA audience is lucky. You already know that making music, dancing, and singing together are the most natural human activities that help people feel connected, engaged, and happy. It's not all about the applause. 🐼



Evie Ladin. Photo by Snap Jackson.



ANY OLD TIME STRING BAND

“The Most Fun I’ve Ever Had in a Band”

by Jon Hartley Fox for the *Bluegrass Breakdown*

As part of the CBA’s 50th anniversary celebration, the *Bluegrass Breakdown* has been spotlighting some of the significant individuals and bands from the organization’s early years. The focus this time is on one of California’s most celebrated bands from the 1970s and ‘80s, the Any Old Time String Band.

Bluegrass wasn’t the only thing going on in the Bay Area’s traditional music scene in the 1970s. Between 1975 and ‘82, the Any Old Time String Band, an all-women old-time quintet, was one of the most popular bands on the circuit, playing to packed houses first at the Plough and Stars, and then later at Paul’s Saloon, where they held down two nights a week.

The band recorded two albums: *Any Old Time String Band* (Arhoolie, 1978) and *Ladies Choice* (Bay, 1980). What set them apart from their contemporaries was an incredibly diverse repertoire that ranged far beyond old-time fiddle tunes and string band music to include pre-war country music like the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, Cajun, jazz, classic blues, Western swing, early pop music, show tunes, and what whatever else struck their collective fancy.

This oral-history roundtable with the six surviving members of the band—fiddler Sue Draheim died in 2013—presents a multi-

faceted look at this important link in the old-time chain. Sharing their memories are **Kate Brislin** (banjo, bass, guitar), **Genny Haley** (guitar, banjo, Dobro, bass), **Valerie Mindel** (bass, guitar), **Suzy Rothfield Thompson** (fiddle, bass), **Barb Montoro Swan** (bass) and **Bethany Raine Sorkey** (bass).

Genny: “The story starts out in 1975 with three of us busking at Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco. It was Valerie, Kate, and I busking. We called ourselves the Beach

Street Barn Dance Band, for lack of a better name. It soon fell by the wayside.”

Valerie: “I was hosting an Irish night at the Plough and Stars in San Francisco, and they asked me if I would start an old-time music night. I knew Kate and I knew Genny. We’d played music before and we all got along well.”

Kate: “Valerie called me and said, ‘Hey, I’ve got a gig. You want to start a band?’ I said, ‘Sure.’ So, Valerie, Genny, and I started playing every Tuesday night at the Plough and Stars.”

Genny: “We had never really played on a stage before as a band, so we practiced in Valerie’s Russian Hill apartment using coffee cans to mark where the microphones would be.”

Kate: “We quickly decided we needed a fiddler and started working with a woman named Linda Keen. When she left, Suzy moved to the Bay Area and joined the band. We started to draw big crowds. It just kept getting bigger and bigger as word of mouth spread about this all-woman old-time band.”

Valerie: “We heard [from Gene Tortora] that Paul’s Saloon was looking to add another band to the mix. We went over and auditioned at Paul’s, and Paul said he’d hire us on two conditions: that we add a bass to the band and that we play standing up. None of us wanted to be ‘the bass player,’ so we decided to buy a bass, and then all of us would learn to play it. The idea was we’d take turns playing the bass.”

Kate: “Now that we were playing more, we needed a real band name. Suzy looked at our set list and said, ‘How about ‘Any Old Time,’ after the Jimmie Rodgers song we performed. And that’s what we went with.”

cont’d →



Kate Brislin (left) and Valerie Mindel (right). Photo courtesy of Valerie Mindel.

Top photo: Any Old Time String Band, 1977. (L-R) Valerie Mindel, Sue Draheim, Suzy Thompson, Genny Haley, Kate Brislin. Photo by Roger Ressmeyer.

Suzy: "Playing at Paul's was hard work—four sets a night, 45-minute sets, and you couldn't repeat anything from earlier sets. That was a lot of material for a band in their 20s. And Paul Lampert, the owner, lived upstairs from the bar, and if the band was a minute late returning from its break, he'd call down to the phone at the bar, and we'd be like Pavlov's dogs and all hurry to our places onstage."

Genny: "I loved Paul's Saloon. We just enjoyed the hell out of playing there. Paul worked you very hard, but we filled the place up. It was a fun space, and I absolutely loved it."

Kate: "Suzy knew another fiddler named Sandy Stark, and we invited her to join the band. So now we had two fiddles, and it was really fun and exciting. But Sandy left, so we were back to one fiddle for a while. Meanwhile, Sue Draheim had moved back to the Bay Area from England in 1976. She'd been there several years, playing with John Renbourn. We played with her a bit and enjoyed it, and she was a good fit, so she joined the band."

Suzy: "I met Sue, and like everybody else who met her, I fell in love with her. There are some musicians who blaze a path by playing in their own style. And then there are musicians who are able to glom on to whatever is already happening and create a new thing. And Sue was that kind of musician—really creative. She was classically trained and played with beautiful tone and was really in tune and really rhythmic. It didn't sound like a scratchy old hillbilly down from the mountain. It was a sound you wanted to listen to because it was really beautiful."

Kate: "We played whatever anyone wanted to bring to the band. Almost all of it was okay with all of us because it was fun."

Genny: "Right from the start, finding material was part of the attraction for all of us bringing in material. If we liked a song and could work it up, we'd perform it."

Kate: "Valerie brought in old-time harmony stuff like the Carter Family and mandolin rags from the 1920s. Sue contributed old fiddle tunes. Suzy brought in old blues and jazz and Cajun music. Genny brought in blues and jazz and novelty songs like 'C-U-B-A' and 'Pasadena.' I brought in stuff like the Stanley Brothers, Jimmy Martin, and Hazel and Alice."

Valerie: "Remember that we were playing four hours a night, two nights a week at Paul's. We needed lots of material and were always willing to try out new stuff."

Suzy: "I think our view of old-time music really had more to do with the New Lost City Ramblers than it did with, say, Tommy Jarrell. The Ramblers played all kinds of

music. That's where I first heard Cajun music, for example."

Suzy: "Chris Strachwitz [the owner of Arhoolie Records] loved our band and came to a lot of our gigs. He was a big fan. So, we asked him to record us, and he said he would. We did the whole thing in two sessions, playing live in the studio."

Kate: "Most of the cuts were done in one take or, at most, two takes. But we were really tight from playing so much at Paul's, so that really wasn't a problem for us."

Suzy: "Working with Chris in the studio was interesting. He really didn't have the musical language to talk about music with musicians. Being in tune or out of tune didn't mean a thing to him. It was all visceral. It was all about how it made him feel. And that's actually a good quality for a record producer to have."

Kate: "We didn't do a lot of touring compared to some bands, but we made several trips up and down the West Coast, from San Diego and Los Angeles in the south to Portland and Seattle in the north. We did a tour of Minnesota, where we played on the *Prairie Home Companion* radio show. We went to Hawaii in 1980 for a week or so."

Kate: "Valerie left the band in 1978, and we got Barb Montoro at that point to play bass. And then Suzy left the following year and moved back East with her husband [guitarist] Eric Thompson to play with Mac Benford in his Backwoods Band. Sue did not want to get another fiddler, so we were a four-piece band for another couple of years."

Barb: "I was only in the band for about a year. When Valerie left, the rest of them decided they didn't want to play bass anymore, so they hired me for that. I did some singing, but I was primarily the bass player."

Kate: "I was kind of steering the band at this point, and I thought it was time to make another record because we had a lot of material we hadn't recorded. Chris [Strachwitz] didn't want to do an album of us without two fiddlers because that was a big part of what he liked about us—the feel, the sound, the energy of the two fiddles. So, we approached Mike Cogan at Bay Records, and he happily agreed to record us."

Barb: "The main thing I remember from recording that album is that there was an earthquake right in the middle of one of our sessions. The engineer stopped the session, and I took my bass and huddled in a doorway until it was over."

Bethany: "I joined the band in 1980 when Barb left. I had just started playing bass. I was really excited to be asked to be in a band with these great players. I loved learning the material and just being with these other women. They were mentors to me.



Any Old Time Stringband, 1977. Photo courtesy of Valerie Mindel

They were a little bit older than me, and they knew all kinds of things that I wanted to know about."

Genny: "We never wanted to be a back-porch kind of band, which was sort of different from many old-time bands at that time. We wanted to be main-stage performers at festivals, so we worked really hard on our stage presence. I think that's one of the things that set us apart."

Bethany: I loved playing with and traveling with the band. We got to do some really fun things, including going to Hawaii and the Vancouver Folk Festival. The band had a lot of opportunities. They had a lot of fans. There was enthusiasm when we showed up at things. They had the greatest energy. I just loved being a part of it.

Kate: "I had been managing and booking the band for several years, and by 1981, I was getting pretty burned out. We had a few gigs that year, but by 1982, the Any Old Time String Band was no more. But it was really fun; it was the most fun I've ever had in a band, because of the variety and the camaraderie. We were all really good friends." 🐘



Listen to *I Bid You Goodnight*, a compilation of tracks from the Arhoolie and Bay Records recordings, on Spotify.



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Summer Music Camp Caterer Steven Shabry

25 Years and a Great Tempeh Reuben

by Adam Roszkiewicz, CBA Camp Coordinator

Sometimes all it takes is learning one little detail about a person's story for everything you already know about them to make complete sense. Before Steven Shabry's Blue Sun Café appeared as a vendor at the CBA's Father's Day Festival, he and his buddy Mongo were following The Grateful Dead and feeding folks from their truck in parking lots across the country.

Like many of those who have made up the fabric of the CBA over the years, Steven's love of music is paired with the desire to provide a space for people to connect and form a community around their shared experience. After Jerry Garcia died, Steven and Mongo were deciding what to do next, which eventually led them to the Strawberry and High Sierra music festivals, and in 1997, CBA's Father's Day Festival.

Instead of sticking with the standard festival fare he found at FDF that first year, Steven decided to fill a void that existed for healthy, vegetarian food. In addition to the tamale pie he'd been serving at Strawberry, that first menu included the now legendary tempeh Reuben sandwich. Serving tempeh to a traditional bluegrass crowd back in 1997 (many folks had never heard of the ingredient) sparked almost as much conversation as the banjo on his Blue Sun Café's logo. Festival goers were eager to weigh in, ask questions, share opinions and banjo jokes, (a genre of which Mongo quickly became a connoisseur) and hang out. Some 25 years later, when Molly

Tuttle headlined FDF, she made sure to ask if the tempeh Reuben was going to be on the menu, and Steven made sure it was.

Getting to know the people he is feeding is important to Steven. He's always chatting with folks. As a result, Steven is almost an unofficial historian of the CBA. If you have a question about some CBA lore from the last quarter century, chances are Steven can tell you all about it.

After a few years vending at the festival, Steven struck up a conversation with Ingrid Noyes, the founder and then director of the CBA's Summer Music Camp. The next year he started catering the camp, something he's continued to do for the last 25 years.

Originally the camp didn't have access to the festival ground on the first night of camp. This led to Steven and crew serving dinner from a picnic table in the campground: "It was all hands on deck!" Steven remembers, with current and future board members jumping on the line to help serve. Things have evolved a bit since then; Steven and his crew still build their entire kitchen on-site and feed around 250 campers, instructors, and volunteers, which amounts to around 2,500 meals each camp. This ingenuity and self-sufficiency can be traced back to those years following the Dead, serving food in parking lots across the country.

What drives Steven is not just fueling the party; it's the desire to take care of people. To feed them food that is made by humans, that will make them feel good, and give them the energy to make and enjoy music and this special community. This year Steven was given a special commendation from CBA at the 50th Father's Day Festival, in recognition of his quarter century of service to Summer Music Camp and the FDF.

It's worth taking a moment to appreciate that 50 years is an impressive run for an event, and for half of those 50 years, Steven Shabry and Blue Sun Café have been a part of it. We are lucky to have him. 🐻

Steven Shabry was one of two longtime CBA partners recognized at the 2025 FDF for their exceptional service; our story on George Relles ran in the July Bluegrass Breakdown.



Steven Shabry at Summer Music Camp 2024.
Photo by Alan Bond.



Blue Sun Cafe's first year at Father's Day Festival in 2003. Photo by Rick Cornish.



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L.A.'S OLD-TIME SCENE

cont'd from front page

At the park was a wooden stage, a microphone, and a chalkboard. Fiddlers would sign up and play three songs. An audience, usually wives of the players—all men—sat around drinking coffee and munching on cookies. There were accompanists: a woman named Ossie White would play the guitar, and Mel Durham, who became president of the group, would play slap bass when he wasn't playing fiddle. Backstage, Bob Rogers would dance and stomp his feet to the rhythm. "Womp that thing!" he would yell at Ossie. Behind the stage, other fiddlers jammed and worked together to learn new songs. Someone occasionally yelled to one of the jammers, "It's your turn. You're on!" and dragged them back to the stage area to play.

Bob and his friends adopted Gwen. Bob would come over and say, "Children (although he was talking only to Gwen), let me show you another tune." He would play a song for her to record and learn; when she learned the tune, he would laugh, happy and joyful. It was the pleasure of giving something of value to the next generation. Music is an inheritance.

The regulars shared songs among themselves. Many of the older fiddlers were transplants who came to California in the 1930s and 1940s, drawn by the abundance of jobs. Earl Collins was from Oklahoma and a fine short-bow player who tapped his foot in double time. Roscoe White from Arkansas was the state senior fiddle champion. Mel Durham, who played both bass and fiddle, was the president of the club for 15 years. His brother, Don, was also a fiddler and guitarist. There were others, such as Bruce Johnson on fiddle, Jerry Higby, who played banjo, and Bud Shields, who played Native American tunes. There were occasional visitors—once Tracy Schwarz of the New Lost City Ramblers showed up to interview Bob Rogers.

Since they came from all over, they played old-time music in the style they learned back home. Each of the fiddlers came to the meetings with their own regional accents and their own regional



Gwen and the fiddlers who shared their music.
Photo courtesy of Gwen Koyanagi.

way of playing the fiddle. There was no one "correct" way to play. Earl Collins, who was from Missouri and then Oklahoma, might get up on stage and play a tune. Then Bob Rogers, from Tennessee, might get up and say, "That was fine, Brother Collins. But this is how I play it!" He would play the same tune, but sounding very different. The Canadians, too, had their own style. And of course, there were disagreements on what the different tunes were called. The song that Earl Collins called "Rabbit, Where's Your Mammy?" was a song that Mel Durham called "Got a Little Home to Go To." And sometimes they differed on the melody. Once, Tom Sauber recalled Earl Collins and Mel Durham arguing about how a tune went. Earl finally put his foot down and said, "Mel, I gave you that song!"

TOM SAUBER: CALIFORNIA'S HOMEGROWN OLD-TIME MUSICIAN

In the early 1960s, Pete Seeger and the folk music scene encouraged people to take up an instrument and make music. Tom Sauber was one of those young people. He picked up a banjo and Seeger's instruction book and started to play. He spent nights listening to musicians at the Ash Grove and other local venues. In 1963, he heard the New Lost City Ramblers at Los Angeles City College, and that drove him to old-time music.

In his senior year in high school, Tom got a fiddle and started going to some contests, like the Legg Lake Contest in El Monte. He entered in banjo, fiddle, and guitar contests and won best all-around musician. There he met a woman who sang Carter Family songs, and she convinced him to go to the Signal Hill old-time fiddlers group. There he heard Earl Collins and others play the way he wanted to play. Just like they did with Gwen, the



Tom Sauber and Stuart Duncan in 1974.
Photo courtesy of Peter Feldmann.

older fiddlers would slow down their tunes so that Tom could learn them. At the time, Tom was studying for a degree in folk music at UCLA and he transcribed some of Earl's tunes.

Over the years, Tom has played with many other musicians, including Brad Leftwich, Alice Gerrard, Dirk Powell and John Herrmann, and North Carolina banjo picker Eddie Lowe. Tom helped bring authentic traditional music to the film industry. Ry Cooder recruited him for the soundtrack of *The Long Riders*. He also appeared in *Bound for Glory*, *Geronimo*, and *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. He hosted a radio show for 12 years on Southern California's KPFK radio.

Tom has inspired old-time musicians in Southern California not only as a performer, but also as a teacher. His son, Patrick, is also an accomplished musician carrying on the family tradition.

PETER FELDMANN: SPREADING THE WORD

Another member of L.A.'s younger old-time generation was Peter Feldmann. Born in Switzerland, Peter came to the U.S. in 1946 as a 5-year-old. Peter fell in love with American folk music when he heard cowboy songs at the movies and when he heard recordings of the Carter Family and Jimmy Rogers. Although he spoke English with a strong German accent, American music made Peter feel like an American. Peter has said that foreigners can look at American music more objectively than natives—they have no prejudices about the music being "hillbilly music." He started playing the guitar and took up other instruments. During a two-year stay in Chicago, he was introduced to traditional music at the Old Town School of Folk Music. He got to know most of the Seeger family and worked at a local radio station. Returning to Santa Barbara in 1962, he found that someone had decided to start an FM station, announcing "Welcome to KGUD Country! We've eliminated all the raucous banjos and squawky fiddles to play only REAL country music!" Taking this as a challenge, he talked the station into giving him a weekly program with a different point of view. Over the years his show, *The Bluegrass Breakdown*, introduced locals to a variety of traditional music. Peter also started a music club called the Bluebird Café and an independent record label, Sonyatone and Hen Cackle Records, which continue to this day.

Over the years, Peter has played and recorded with many top musicians. A recording titled *Tom, Dick and Pete* features fiddler Richard Greene, Tom



Earl Collins (center), and Gwen Koyanagi (right).
Photo courtesy of Gwen Koyanagi.



Tom Sauber. Photo via Facebook.



(Right to left) Richard Greene, Peter Feldmann, and Tom Sauber. Photo courtesy of Peter Feldmann.

Sauber on guitar and banjo, and Peter on mandolin and guitar.

One day, Chris Strachwitz, founder of roots record company Arhoolie Records, called Peter to find a venue where blues singer Mance Lipscomb could put on a concert. Peter had no experience putting on concerts, but learned that UCSB would rent rooms only to student groups with a faculty advisor. Asking for a list of student groups, Peter randomly settled on the Mountaineering Club. He asked the president of the club if he'd like to make some money by letting him put on a concert in the club's name. The concert was a success. A year and several concerts later, Peter was on his own, putting on concerts under his new group, The Old Time Music Front, with the goal "to subvert students to listen to American folk music." These concerts introduced audiences to groups like the New Lost City Ramblers, the Stanley Brothers, and others.

THE RISE OF LOCAL CONTESTS

With the influx of new fiddle and banjo players, fiddle and banjo contests sprang up. There were many in the '60s and '70s. Among them was the Topanga Banjo Fiddle Contest.

The Topanga Banjo Fiddle Contest and Folk Festival began in 1961 and continues to this day—its 64th year. The first contest was held in Topanga Canyon and started with 30 contestants, four judges, and 500 fans. In 1962, it moved to Topanga Canyon's Camp Wildwood and added folk singing, old time, and bluegrass to the contest.

The festival almost ended in 1970, following the now-infamous Altamont rock festival in Northern California, where a Hells Angels gang member fatally stabbed a man who jumped on the stage



1974 UCSB Fiddler's Convention. Photo courtesy of Peter Feldmann.

from the audience. As a result, some places, including Los Angeles County, banned all outdoor concerts.

Topanga's organizers called on Peter Feldmann to see if the festival could be held at UC Santa Barbara, where outdoor concerts were still legal. When asked, the university wanted Peter to guarantee that there would be no murders at the contest. He tried to convince them that this was a family event, and a few days later he was notified that the contest was approved. It turned out that a police captain had called the campus to enter his daughter, a fiddle student of Peter's, in the competition. That clinched it. The contest was held at UCSB.

The next year, the Topanga Contest moved to UCLA. UC Santa Barbara, left with no banjo and fiddle contest, asked Peter if he could start one for them. The Santa Barbara Old-Time Fiddlers' Festival was born in 1972. It is now celebrating its 53rd year, directed today by David Bragger.

SOUTHLAND OLD-TIME TODAY

David Bragger found himself drawn to old-time music when he began to teach himself the banjo and fiddle—instruments given to him by relatives. "I love being able to play music crafted over decades or centuries ... sharing that, participating and learning and jamming it, is a form of time travel. I'm existing in multiple times simultaneously. Somebody did it last month, a decade ago, 130 years ago." He found teachers in Mel Durham and Tom Sauber and was a quick student. Today he is a lecturer in ethnomusicology at UCLA and heads the UCLA Old-Time String Band Ensemble. He is very optimistic about the old-time culture in the Southland and here is why:



David Bragger. Photo courtesy of David Bragger.

The Los Angeles Old Time Social started in 2006 as a way to have an old-time party ahead of the Sunday Topanga Banjo Fiddle Contest. Inspired by the spirit of the Portland Old-Time Music Gathering, it featured a Friday night concert and a Saturday backyard jam party and square dance. The festival made it through 14 years in 2019, when covid stopped it. It was revived this year as the 15th Ever L.A. Old Time Social.

The L.A. Squares group has become known for square dancing. They gather monthly—except for a July break—in North Hollywood at the Mayflower Club.

Since 2009, the Old-Time Tiki Parlour has served as a concert hall, workshop, and instructional epicenter for old-time music in Los Angeles and beyond. David Bragger and Rick Hocutt founded Tiki Parlour Recordings to record old-time music. The releases have included Bruce Molsky, Sammy Lind, Tom and Patrick Sauber, and Sausage Grinder. This year David plans to have six album releases, including the Horsenecks, Hog-Eyed Man from Georgia, and Clinton Davis.

Old-time music in Southern California promises to be around for a very long time.

Thanks to Gwen Koyanagi, Peter Feldmann, Tom Sauber, Dennis Fetchet, Chris Webb, and David Bragger for their contributions to this story. 🐘



Santa Barbara Fiddlers' Convention in 1974. Photo courtesy of Peter Feldmann.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING



EARL COLLINS
That's Earl
1975, Sierra Briar Records



TOM CARTER & TOM SAUBER
with Blanton Owen, Leonard Coulson & Patrick Sauber
Trade Your Headache for a Smile
2021, Tiki Parlour Recordings



PETER FELDMANN
& the Pea Patch Quintet
Grey Cat on a Tennessee Farm
Songs of Uncle Dave Macon
2005, Hen Cackle Records



TIKI PARLOUR PLAYLIST
A great video playlist of artists recorded at the Old-Time Tiki Parlour.



REGIONAL DIRECTORS

cont'd from front page

While Bob was busy in Sacramento, other volunteers began taking on the same role in different territories. Mark Hogan anchored the North Coast, helping touring bands string together dates from Sonoma to Oregon. John Hettinger formalized house concerts and refined the email newsletter template for Sacramento. But the map still had blank spots. "There was zero happening in the southern half of the state," recalls CBA Board Chair Ted Kuster. "Today, we have Ryan Schindler in the Central Valley, Richard Wheeler in Riverside, and Donna Hargis in Los Angeles," he said. Each regional director brings a different flavor, yet followed the same rough blueprint Bob drafted for the area vice presidents in the 1990s.

So, what does a regional director actually do today? Ted boils the job down to three buckets:

Increase CBA visibility. This includes things like hosting CBA information booths and putting up banners at area gigs, answering questions about goings on in the local bluegrass community, and inviting newcomers to join the fun.

Promote community jams. Ideally, every region should have at least one public jam—no audition, no set list; just show up and pick.

Support musicians. This typically includes helping local bands and touring acts connect with local gigs, filling dates in a band's tour schedule, or finding help for acts cutting their first record.

Most directors already do at least one of these things in their region before they ever accept the title. Darcy Ford, the newest regional director, already ran the Stockton Soul soul orchestra and an old-time jam before she took on the official CBA role in her neck of the woods.

Regional work is 100% volunteer based, which means motivation rises and falls with the goings-on in each director's life. "Everything depends on whether folks wake up with energy," Ted said. Accountability is gentle, usually a monthly email summary of what's happening in each region, because CBA would rather nurture goodwill than police hours. Still, CBA leadership sees there are limits to this model. The association's current membership hovers around 3,000; Ted and CBA Executive Director Pete Ludé believe our statewide membership would need to be closer to 10,000 to fully realize CBA's potential. To serve that many households, the director corps would have to intensify its efforts beyond the 15 most-active regions to all 30 of the association's current regions.

One experiment happening now to help grease these wheels is appointing co-directors within a region. The Central Coast region now has two leaders

sharing the duties, and other large regions may follow suit. The CBA board has set aside a modest cash pool—roughly \$2,500—to help directors rent rooms for events, print flyers, or pay a guest artist to run a music workshop. It is, as Ted admits, "hardly more than gas money," but it signals that local work carries real value.

CBA's success has never hinged on a single festival or one big donor; it rests on neighbors who fold newsletters, stack chairs, and hand new pickers their first chord chart. Bob Thomas likes to say volunteering "kept me out of trouble." That may be true, but it also built an organization that now blankets much of the Golden State. The next chapter likely will be written the same way the first one was: around a kitchen table, with a little help from friends.

This article is part of the CBA's 50th-anniversary series celebrating the origin stories and future paths of key Association programs. If you'd like to keep the circle growing, consider stepping up as a regional director—or simply renew your membership and join the jam.



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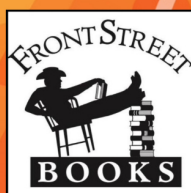
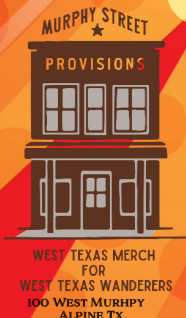
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OLD-TIME MUSIC

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Any Old Time String Band. Photo by Ray Edlund



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By Bert Daniel, Breakdown Contributor

Our June trivia question appeared in our annual youth issue, and came from CBA Youth Program Director and President Emerita Darby Brandli: **"What Kids on Bluegrass singer was the first to be joined spontaneously by a famous performer on harmony vocals at the Grand Ole Opry?"**

This one was a stumper! Only **Mike Staninec** came up with the correct answer, and he was one of just two submissions we received in response to this question!

The singer (and guitar player) was Brittany Bailey, who participated in CBA's Kids on Bluegrass in the late 1990s. She was a standout musician who eventually moved to Nashville and was a member of The Grasshoppers for a brief time. Her debut, self-titled 2003 recording was hailed by the *Bluegrass Breakdown's* Rob Shotwell as "a well-conceived and well-executed debut. Serving not only as an unveiling of her excellent lead vocal talents, this CD also showcases her considerable songwriting talents as well." When she stepped on stage at the Opry at age 12, she was joined for a song by none other than Alison Krauss—before Union Station was formed and about 10 years into the Kids on Bluegrass program.

For knowing this deeply obscure bit of CBA Kids on Bluegrass history, Mike wins a copy of the rare book *JD's Bluegrass Kitchen*, a collection of stories and exquisite recipes from CBA's own JD Rhynes.

AUGUST TRIVIA CHALLENGE

In line with our August old-time music and dance theme, we pose this question to our readers for this month's trivia: **Who was the first clogging group to perform at the CBA Father's Day Festival?**

Send your answer to:
trivia@californiabluegrass.net
no later than August 31.

This month's prize is a collectable 2025 **50th Anniversary Father's Day Festival poster**: 12" x 18" and printed on high-quality coated paper stock. It's the perfect addition to your music room!

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 October 2025 issue of the *Bluegrass Breakdown*.