



# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

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



Nov/Dec  
2025



## IBMA COMES TO CHATTANOOGA

by Helen Ludé for the Bluegrass Breakdown

If you love bluegrass music, you've probably heard of **IBMA World of Bluegrass**, the International Bluegrass Music Association's annual five-day event that features a business conference, tradeshow, awards show, artist showcases, and a two-day music festival. Created to foster the growth and development of bluegrass music, this event is often referred to as "the biggest week of bluegrass music," attracting thousands of industry professionals, artists, and fans from far and wide: from Japan, France, Chile, and New Zealand to Kentucky, Minnesota, Colorado, and California. IBMA celebrated its 40th anniversary this year from September 15-20, 2025, at its new home in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

IBMA's first year in Chattanooga was a smashing success, with a vibrant walkable city, bustling business conference, the poignant keynote by Billy Strings, and an all-star festival lineup. Named the "Friendliest City in the USA," Chattanooga certainly welcomed bluegrass with open arms, embracing the inevitable chaos that happens when banjos and beer overrun your city center. There were myriad dining and hotel options and the music venues were hopping. Compared to previous years, more artists from Nashville made the journey to come pick, the hotel and convention center were easier to navigate, and the single conference center hallway ensured you ran into all your friends.

The **IBMA Business Conference** kicked off on Tuesday, following a warm and welcoming press conference, two days of board meetings, and the annual **Leadership Bluegrass** alumni reception on Monday evening. The business conference is perfect to deepen your professional relationship to bluegrass music, whether you're an artist, industry professional, or simply wanting to get more involved with your local bluegrass community. In just three days, you can attend panel sessions with industry experts, speed date at the annual gig fair for artists and talent buyers, and network with key players in the industry. You may discover your new favorite instrument at the

*cont'd on page 4 →*



## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

### TIME TO CELEBRATE

by Pete Ludé, CBA Executive Director

We're combining the November and December issues of the *Breakdown* this year to give our production team a bit of a break during this frantic time of the year. There has been so much great bluegrass to celebrate—the recently concluded Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in San Francisco, and the successful Huck Finn Jubilee in Southern California. Earlier in September was the Frankly Bluegrass Festival in Plymouth, and of course, the huge **IBMA World of Bluegrass** in Chattanooga, Tennessee. CBA and the California bluegrass community were very well represented at IBMA this year, as you'll learn in our cover story.

Thanks to all of you who participated in our 2025 board elections—the results of which were announced during the October 18 annual membership meeting at the Fall Campout in Lodi. Welcome to our new board members! We are lucky to have an amazing team of volunteers keeping CBA ticking. In between jams at the campout, we also

*cont'd on page 2 →*

## CALIFORNIA'S HISTORIC VENUES

## 50 YEARS OF PICKING PLACES

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

On a summer night in 1977, if you wandered into Paul's Saloon in San Francisco's Marina District, you might hear Vern Williams's tenor soaring above the chatter and clink of pint glasses. It wasn't quiet—Paul's was a neighborhood bar first, bluegrass hall second—but it was alive, with music at the center. Paul's was the place where you could count on bluegrass seven nights a week.

That same year, across the Bay, Freight & Salvage was already established as a listening room where audiences hushed themselves to hear every note. At the Freight, the

stage and audience relationship was reverent; at Paul's, it was raucous and communal. Between the two, you could already see the dual character of California bluegrass venues: part barroom gathering, part concert-hall listening, each nurturing the music in its own way.

As the California Bluegrass Association marks 50 years, it's worth remembering that these clubs, bars, pizza parlors, and listening rooms gave bluegrass a home outside the festival fields. They kept the music alive during the workweek, built communities around bands and

jams, and served as the stage where California's bluegrass identity took shape.

### CALIFORNIA VENUES BEFORE CBA

By the time CBA was founded, the ground had already been prepared by venues and festivals that helped bluegrass find a West Coast audience.

In Los Angeles, the Ash Grove was the beating heart of folk, blues, and bluegrass from 1958–1973. Bill

Monroe, Doc Watson, and Ralph Stanley all passed through, introducing bluegrass to California listeners. The Ash Grove wasn't just a venue; it was a classroom and incubator. A teenage Ry Cooder lurked behind the scenes and absorbed the music. Clarence White honed the guitar style that would change flatpicking forever.

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## BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

Nov/Dec 2025 – Holidays

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*

announced the winners of the 2025 fundraising sweepstakes. Congratulations to the new owners of the Santa Cruz Pre-War D guitar, Deering banjo and Music City Artisan model fiddle from the Fiddle Mercantile! Please support these loyal sponsors who donated the instruments for this wonderful CBA fundraiser.

Now, we are looking forward to the next string of CBA's exciting music events. **South State 48** returns to Carlsbad starting November 6; Donna Hargis and her organizing team have assembled a great slate of free workshops and curated jams for this annual gathering, as well as the band contest and free concert onsite at the Windmill Food Court. Then in January, we will return to the Bakersfield Marriott for the **Great 48 Jam**, organized by Debbie Wendt and Jeff Russinski. See all the details on page three of this edition. Registration opens on November 6th for **Julian Family Fiddle Camp**, near San Diego, May 6-10,

2026. Camp Director Adam Roszkiewicz has once again recruited a world-class faculty of instructors. Visit [CaliforniaBluegrass.org](http://CaliforniaBluegrass.org) to learn more, and to sign up.

And the big news for 2026—**Father's Day Bluegrass Festival** returns to Grass Valley on June 18-21. Pre-sale tickets for CBA members will be available starting December 1. There is a fantastic slate of bands booked for the main stage this year, but we're sworn to secrecy until tickets go on sale. We'll also be opening the lottery for assignment of RV hook-up spots on December 1—so mark your calendar. All the info will be on [FathersDayFestival.com](http://FathersDayFestival.com)

The holiday season is all about family and friends, preferably celebrating with music. In this edition, we've put together a set of ideas for holiday gifts from our sponsors, as well as a holiday gift guide for CBA merchandise—perfect for the bluegrass fans on your gift list.

From the full CBA team, we wish you a joyous holiday season, and a happy and healthy 2026.



## California Connections IBMA Award Winners!



**ALISON BROWN**  
INSTRUMENTAL RECORDING  
OF THE YEAR  
"Ralph's Banjo Special"



**GINA DILG**  
GRAPHIC DESIGNER  
OF THE YEAR



**"CUZIN AL" KNOTH**  
DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT  
AWARD



**BLUEGRASS CARDINALS**  
BLUEGRASS HALL OF FAME

JANUARY 15-18

# Great 48 Jam

BAKERSFIELD

Get ready for a great—and cushy hotel-comfortable—weekend, January 15-18, when bluegrass pickers and grinders will gather at the Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center. Some of them will get a head start by taking Amtrak, boarding from different stops along the San Joaquin line and jamming on the train! Starting Thursday, Jan. 15, you can take part in—or simply enjoy watching—jams all around the hotel. You can expect two or three jams going on in the lobby at all hours, in hotel rooms and near the elevators on the 24-hour jamming floors, in the CBA 9th floor suite, and in the suites of the many regional bluegrass associations including Southwest, North County, San Diego, Central Coast, and Central San Joaquin regions.

## NEW THIS YEAR

### ALL-ACCESS PASS/WRISTBAND

The Great 48 jam has been a free event, with CBA paying the bills through sponsorships and donations. But with significant increases in the costs for facilities and insurance, and considering our mission to support performers and instructors fairly, we are now asking attendees to purchase an "all access pass" wristband. The cost for the full event is \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members. This will entitle you to attend all the hosted jams, the open mic, the Friday night showcase, workshops and other activities. The pass is available on-line and at the event. The pass also includes a raffle ticket. Purchase a wristband at the QR code here:



### RAFFLE: DOC WATSON'S STEEL GUITAR

This year, we will have an exciting raffle exclusive to the Great 48: the Kiesel lap steel guitar that is certified to have belonged to Doc Watson! All-access wristbands include one raffle ticket; additional tickets are \$5 and will be available at the merch table.

### SPECTRUM BLUEGRASS MEETUP

Spectrum Bluegrass, connecting neurodiverse people through bluegrass music, will meet during the Great 48 weekend. Details, including the schedule, will be in the event guide and on the Great 48 website.

## WHAT'S BACK AGAIN

### WERNICK METHOD JAM CLASSES

Those who have attended the Great 48 in years past look forward to seeing old friends and jamming with new ones. If 2026 will be your first time and you're not a seasoned jammer, the Great 48 is a great place to learn. The three-hour Wernick Method jamming classes will be offered four times between Thursday and Saturday; registration for the class is \$60 as an add-on to the weekend. Complete the course and then put your new confidence to practice by joining in the jams all weekend long! Get more information and register at the QR code here:



### HOSTED JAMS

All included with your weekend pass! Slow jam, gospel jams, and a friendly old-time jam, with more to be added. Hosted by experienced players. Check the event website often for updates.

### WORKSHOPS

Attending workshops is a great way to improve your singing or your instrument technique and solos. Visit the Great 48 website often for updates. All workshops are included in the all-access pass.

### DINE IN OR OUT

The Bakersfield Marriott has restaurant and bar menus. There are many independently owned restaurants described in our guide, some within walking distance of the event hotel. Check the Great 48 event page on for more info.

### CONCERTS

Another Great 48 tradition is the Friday night program that begins with the open mic, the workshop presenters' concert, and then finishes the night with a showcase band. This year, the showcase band will feature the Bakersfield sound by a local Bakersfield band, The Soda Crackers! In their own words: "the Soda Crackers celebrate the unsung heroes of the Bakersfield sound, the B-side gems that never get played, and the showmanship plus the instrumentation that all the greats brought to the smoky ol' beer joints & dance halls from years gone by." Free with the all-access wristband, or \$10 at the door.

Many of the regional associations offer showcase concerts in their suites, so be sure to check the event guide when you arrive.

### HOTEL

If you haven't made a reservation at the Marriott yet, call Michelle Sanchez at 661-565-9320 to get on the waiting list. Cancellations happen, so rooms do open up. There are also other hotels nearby—so you can still stay close to the event even if the Marriott rooms are all booked.

### VOLUNTEER AT GREAT 48

Help the CBA make this event the best ever! Volunteer at the welcome table, the merch table or to check wristbands at events while you listen to the great music all around you. And here's an even bigger incentive to volunteer: your all-access pass will be free! Sign up for shifts, scan here:



## WORKSHOPS

### GUITAR: THE HEARTBEAT OF THE JAM TYLER GRANT

### BLUEGRASS FIDDLE ANNIE STANINEC AND DENNIS FETCHET

### LEARN AN OLD-TIME FIDDLE TUNE GEFF AND MASHA CRAWFORD

### BANJO: CHORDS AND SUNDRY JULIO BOYSEN BERRY

### MANDOLIN: INTRO TO MONROE STYLE KEN SMITH

### BLUEGRASS HARMONY BASICS MAUREEN "MO" BLUMENTHAL

## HOSTED JAMS

### SLOW JAM JULIO BOYSEN BERRY

### GOSPEL JAMS SANDY DEVERA & JEFF RUSSINSKY

### FRIENDLY OLD-TIME JAM GEFF AND MASHA CRAWFORD

### TRADITIONAL BLUEGRASS JAMS TYLER GRANT

### BLUEGRASS JAM (THEME TBD) CHAD MANNING

MORE JAMS AND WORKSHOPS TO BE ANNOUNCED!

## FRIDAY SHOWCASE CONCERT



### THE SODA CRACKERS

Bringing back the classics, The Soda Crackers—a five-piece band whose average age barely cracks the 30-something barrier—are in full swing. Make that a full Bakersfield sound with a nice helping of Western swing thrown in as a side dish of sorts. Check them out by scanning the QR code here:



sprawling exhibit hall of vendors, including luthiers, nonprofits, festivals, and artists—or shake hands with your heroes. The Momentum and industry award ceremonies are everyone's favorite lunch gathering, where IBMA recognizes upcoming and outstanding work in non-performer industry categories. You can even start your morning practicing tai chi with Jim Lauderdale!

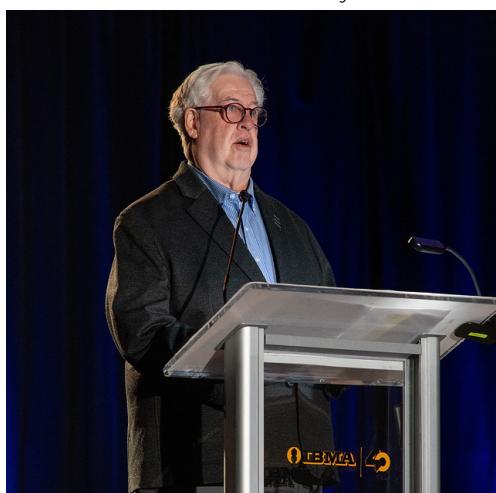
Perhaps you've seen clips of Billy Strings' keynote address and interview with Tom Powers. Billy grew up on Bill Monroe, Larry Sparks, and Jimmy Martin, listening to and learning melodies from his dad. Bluegrass music soon became his social currency, his coping mechanism, his entire heart and soul. Yet, Billy recounts nights when he was boxed out of jams and returned to his tent in tears, emphasizing the need to unite



Water Tower performs for a showcase on Wednesday night. Photo by Robin Frenette.



From left: Joy Louise and Tyler Grant showcase in the Sound Biscuit Room. Photo by Robin Frenette.



Pete Ludé represents CBA at the Industry Award Luncheon. Photo by Robin Frenette.

the invisible divide between "camos and tie-dyes." "Bluegrass music is beautiful because of its diversity of sounds and influences," Billy said. The trunk of Bill Monroe's bluegrass tree has deep roots with new flowers blooming every day. Billy is glad about the flowers! He continues to spread the seeds of bluegrass around the globe, playing traditional songs like "Bringing Mary Home" and "John Deere Tractor" to arenas filled with tens of thousands of people. If you didn't love Billy before, you surely love him now. Check out his keynote on YouTube if you haven't already!

The legendary Paul Williams provided another special moment, singing duets with Doyle Lawson and telling stories about his time with Jimmy Martin and the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers. Hosted by Johnny and Jeanette Williams and Mike Mitchell for a featured songwriters session, Paul and Doyle were joined by IBMA's two-time male vocalist of the year, Greg Blake. At 90 years old, Paul's voice cuts with the same tone, power, and pitch that Martin loved so much!

Then there was a **CBA Kids on Bluegrass** alumni show featuring Frank Solivan, Angelica Grim, Josh Gooding, John Gooding, Joselyn Sky, and Henry Strid. What a treat! Huge thanks to Christopher Howard Williams for presenting the alumni show on the International Stage, and to Josh Gooding and Darby Brandli for organizing. The Mountain Song Productions and Brevard Music Center's Wednesday evening social at Chattanooga Whiskey featured whiskey tasting, food trucks, and music by Béla Fleck, Bryan Sutton, and Casy Driessen.

When the business day ends, the **IBMA Bluegrass Ramble** begins, featuring 27 official showcase artists at local bars and event spaces around town. The Ramble venues are clustered at the heart of downtown Chattanooga, a three-minute drive or 12-minute walk from the Marriott hotel and convention center. IBMA offered six-seater buggies to transport folks to and from the venues, and the city of Chattanooga ran public buses as well. The five venues were all a couple blocks from each other, so you could venue-hop all evening and enjoy a wide variety

of 45-minute showcases from emerging and established talent. Two more showcase spaces were held at the Marriott Convention center ballrooms for folks who wanted to stay closer to home base. All showcase artists performed once at a downtown venue and once at the convention center. Some of my favorites included Mountain Grass Unit at Barrelhouse Ballroom, the Sentimental Gentlemen at Hi Fi Clyde's, and Amy Alvey & the Hometeam Advantage at Gate Eleven Distillery.

The **IBMA Town Hall** took place Thursday morning, giving members an opportunity to share feedback for the IBMA staff and board. Some suggestions included better signage, the addition of food trucks outside the convention hall, and more available transportation to venues. Later that afternoon, Billy Strings awarded Hayden Reidling a Martin D-28 acoustic guitar as the first place winner of Pickin for the Prize flatpicking guitar contest.

That evening, the 36th annual **IBMA Bluegrass Music Awards** show was held at the remarkable Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium, with everyone's favorite pre-awards red carpet cocktail reception to kick it off. Alison Brown and Steve Martin hosted a spectacular evening of awards with great performances from the likes of East Nash Grass, Appalachian Road Show, and others. Familiar faces to the stage like Trey Hensley, Greg Blake, and Vickie Vaughn took home awards, as did new recipients like Maddie Denton. Legends like Hot Rize, Arnold Shultz, and the Bluegrass Cardinals were honored with induction into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame. The show closed with a super-jam with Del McCoury, Billy Strings, Sierra Hull, Kristen Scott Benson, Missy Raines, and more.

After the awards show, everyone flocked to the bar at the Marriott, the central meeting point for old and new buddies throughout the week. The lobby boasted high ceilings and a short elevator ride to a bustling second floor of showcase rooms and all-night jams. Folks picked til the sun came up, just like the good ol' days. The hotel scene was compared to years past in



Kids on Bluegrass jam with Sierra Hull and Justin Moses. Photo by Robin Frenette.

Owensboro, attracting new energy and excited pickers from all around the globe.

The free street fair and two-day festival, **IBMA Bluegrass Live!**, kicked off Friday afternoon. Craft vendors, food trucks, and clothing pop-ups set up shop along Main Street, just outside the ticketed festival grounds of Miller Plaza. The street fair had two stages of free music, one of which presented local youth bands all day long. The festival grounds had three main stages of premier talent including the Wood Brothers, East Nash Grass, Peter Rowan, the Po Ramblin' Boys, and AJ Lee & Blue Summit. The Miller Park stage offered a shaded canopy for a pleasant listening experience during the warmer hours of the day. When the weather cooled off in the evening, folks set up picnic blankets on the lawn, serenaded by the sounds of Sierra Hull. Gillian Welch & Dave Rawlings closed out the festival Saturday night. It was impossible to escape good music all weekend long!

**IBMA Kids on Bluegrass** celebrated its 22nd year, thanks to program director and fiddle rockstar Kimber Ludiker and former director and Sister Sadie bandleader Deanie Richardson. Junior Appalachian Musicians partnered with Kids on Bluegrass to offer a KOB camp track for the second year, in addition to the KOB honors track. Ninety young bluegrass musicians ages 4-17 were selected for four days of rehearsals and performances. The KOB concept was started by Frank Solivan Sr. at the California Bluegrass Association's Father's Day Festival in 1990, and was a highlight of my childhood: an informative experience that teaches band dynamics and stage presence, connects lifelong friends, and breeds the next generation of talent. IBMA KOB boasts alumni like Sierra Hull, Sarah Jaroz, Cory Walker, and Molly Tuttle.

Now, let's talk food! Downtown Chattanooga's dining was abundant and accessible. Pickle Barrel's rooftop patio was my personal favorite, just a short walk from the Marriott, pouring cold beer at happy hour and cooking late night Ruebens until 1 a.m. Community Pie served up New York pizza slices right outside the festival entrance by Miller Plaza, the perfect lunch spot

to catch music on the Youth Stage. Or you could hear 2025 IBMA fiddle player of the year Maddie Denton rip fiddle licks while slurping up creamy ramen on Attack of the Tatsu's outdoor dining deck. Craig Havighurst recommended Southern Star, a hidden meat-and-three gem, and I've heard Main Street Meats has the best ribeye and burger in town. The Public House, Hello Monty, and the Frothy Monkey were a few other favorites for a more upscale dining experience. You really couldn't go wrong!

Mountain Grass Unit hosted a sold out after-party of the century on Saturday night, with special guest sit-ins from Jason Carter, Michael Cleveland, AJ Lee, Wyatt Ellis, Kimber Ludiker, Jalee Roberts, and Deanie Richardson. The show was held at The Signal, a 2,000 capacity event space with generous balcony views and an inviting dance floor—one heck of a party and an even more well-deserved celebratory "we did it" moment for the event leaders. It was the perfect way to close out the busiest week for bluegrass music!

Change can be daunting and moving the convention to Chattanooga was not without its challenges. Huge props to Ken White and the IBMA staff, board, sponsors, volunteers, and site selection committee, as well as Jill Synder, Claire Ambuster, Zach Taylor, Julie Aujala, Paul Schminger, Kimber Ludiker, the city of Chattanooga, and hundreds of others who made this event an enormous success. It was as perfect as any first-year event could be, and that's pretty darn good!

I am a proud lifetime member of the IBMA and I plan on attending World of Bluegrass for the rest of my life. Please consider becoming a member of the International Bluegrass Music Association if you are not already! Members vote in the annual performance awards, have access to special programming such as IBMA's Leadership Bluegrass, a three-day professional development intensive, and participate in the success and bright future of bluegrass music. 🐾

*Helen Ludé is a member of the IBMA board of directors, serves as a tour manager and booking agent, and is a CBA Kids on Bluegrass alum.*



(L to R) Darby Brandli, Helen Ludé, Ted Kuster, and Mary Kussmaul at the Youth Stage during the weekend festival. Photo courtesy of Helen Ludé.



AJ Lee & Blue Summit on stage at IBMA Bluegrass Live! downtown. Photo by Alex Culbreth.



(L to R) Kristin Scott-Benson, Gena Britt, and Alison Brown at the IBMA Awards. Photo by Dan Schram.



Mountain Grass Unit hosts the sold out Saturday night after-party at The Signal. Photo by Alex Culbreth.

# Julia Belle

## THE FIDDLEVERSE OF JOHN HARTFORD

by Mei Lin Heirendt for the Bluegrass Breakdown

Perhaps you know the song “Gentle On My Mind?” Yeah, me too. Many of us heard Glen Campbell sing it before we ever knew it was penned by the brilliant mind of John Hartford. Or maybe you’ve also played “Steam Powered Aereo Plane” in a jam circle, like I did one year at the Father’s Day Festival before I knew who wrote it.

Though John Hartford was from St. Louis, Missouri, he spent a significant amount of time here in California, having moved to L.A. in 1968 to record on The Byrd’s *Sweethearts of the Rodeo* and be a regular guest on the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* as well as the *Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour*, where Glen’s massively successful cover of “Gentle On My Mind” gave John the freedom to pursue his music without worrying about financial pressure.

I’ve been humbled to play a small part in keeping his vibrant spirit alive. At the beginning of this year, thanks to my good friend and former CBA Youth Ambassador Tessa Schwartz, I began helping manage John Hartford’s social media campaign in anticipation of the new album *Julia Belle: The John Hartford Fiddle Tune Project, Vol. 2*, released February 2025. Collaborating with John’s daughter, Katie, has been an immense honor as we work to spread these tunes into what she calls the “fiddleverse.”

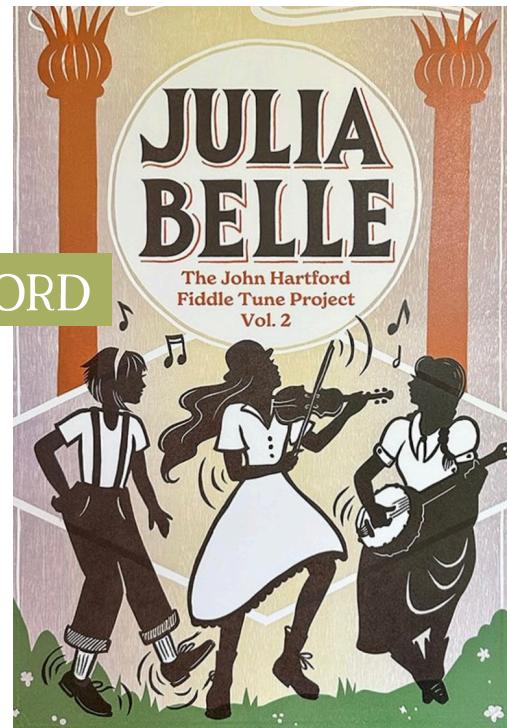
After John passed away in 2001, dozens of composition notebooks were found in his archive, filled with over 4,000 fiddle tunes, most of which had never been released or even heard by the public. Thus the John Hartford Fiddle Tune Project was born. The core of this group was originally California’s own Megan Lynch Chowning on fiddle, Tristin Scroggins on mandolin, and

Adam Hurt on banjo, but there have since been countless top-notch musicians who have joined the rotation in live performances as well as studio recordings.

The goal of this project is to bring musicians together who wouldn’t normally be collaborating with each other while delivering these tunes to the ears and hearts of as many people as possible. We want to make his music accessible and emphasize that these tunes aren’t just for fiddle! In fact, you can find many non-traditional bluegrass instruments like oboe, cello, and octave mandolin on this project—a nod to John’s inclusivity and a reminder that great music transcends labels.

The two albums in the project—the first released in 2020—are entirely drawn from the book, *John Hartford’s Mammoth Collection of Fiddle Tunes*. Daughter Katie and former Hartford String Band member Matt Combs worked with musicologist Greg Reish to compile 176 of what they considered the best of Hartford’s heretofore-unknown compositions into this book, and included, as well, interviews with John’s friends, family, and musical collaborators, doodles from his notebooks, quotes, and old photos from his personal archive.

In his final decade, after being diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, John Hartford’s creative energy became relentless. He was racing against time, not out of fear, but out of profound love for music and a need to give back everything he could. He developed an obsession with everything fiddle related; tediously practicing every technical and rhythmical aspect on the instrument he could think of, learning how to read and write notation,



Julia Belle poster design by Heather Moulder.

refining his handwriting in a Victorian-era style, and writing more than 4,000 tunes. This applied socially as well as musically—he always made time for everyone, always had his door open, always took the up-and-coming under his wing. Jim Wood said, “There was so much John Hartford to go around, it wasn’t like it all got used up on one or two people.”

I’m sad that I never got to meet John, but he’s here in this book and these tunes, and it has been an absolute joy getting to know him through this collection. I strongly encourage folks to get to know John better by giving *Julia Belle* a spin.



(L-R) Rachel Baiman, Sharon Gilchrist, and Ella Korth, part of the John Hartford Fiddle Tune Project Tour. Image courtesy of John Hartford Fiddle Project.

Learn more about John Hartford’s legacy at [JohnHartford.com](https://JohnHartford.com) →



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# LATEST RELEASES

## MIGHTY FINE BLUEGRASS AND OLD-TIME MUSIC FROM CALIFORNIA

by the Bluegrass Breakdown

The CBA's golden anniversary year was a boon for bluegrass and old-time music fans, with new releases from late-2024 to October 2025 that show the variety and innovation of our creative musical community while paying tribute to the traditions that brought us here!



### Cover to Cover VI AJ Lee & Blue Summit

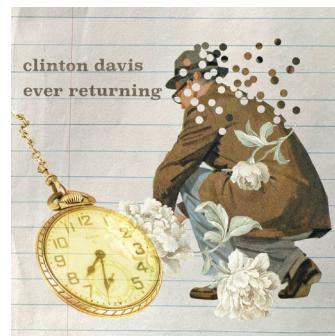
Released on October 17, this EP of five tunes reflects the band's favorite covers performed live on tour. AJ recently told *Bluegrass Today*'s John Lawless: "We love doing original material, but there's something so fun and refreshing about putting our own spin on classic songs most people know." Selections include "Glendale Train," written by John Dawson and first recorded by the New Riders of the Purple Sage; "I'm a Believer," written by Neil Diamond and popularized by The Monkees; "Takes One to Know One" from Jimmy Martin; and the 1933 swing number "Who Walks in When I Walk Out" by Elsie Carlisle, but perhaps best known as a 1952 collaboration between Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Lindsay Lou, Tray Hensley, Kyle Tuttle, Anh Phung, and Tim Bluhm join the fun as guest musicians in this latest set of gems from one of the most popular California bluegrass bands making music today.



### Golden Grass The Brothers Comatose

The *Bluegrass Signal* describes the title track of this album as a "loping bluegrass number that pays tribute to the special regional string band styles and genre-bending of their home state, California." The addition of mandolinist Addie Levy to the band this year deepens the Brothers' bluegrass(y) sound while keeping

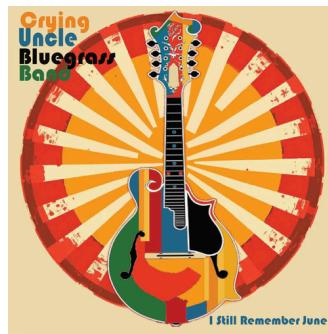
that modern folk vibe that has created a passionate national following for this Bay-Area band with a national following. Jim Simpson put it simply in his review of *Golden Grass* for *Americana Highways*, saying they "honor tradition without sounding stuck in it." The album features many guest appearances, including Ronnie McCoury, Lindsey Lou, and fellow Californian Jesse Appelman.



### Ever Returning Clinton Davis

Clinton Davis has an uncanny knack for creating innovative arrangements of old-time repertoire that unite the American musical traditions of Appalachia, blues, early jazz, and gospel—and performs expertly on a variety of string instruments in

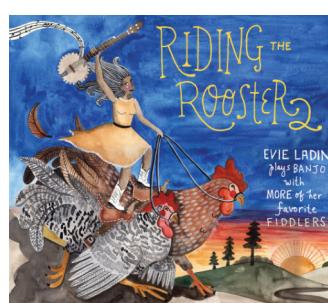
dazzling, uncommon combinations that are both sonically familiar and completely fresh. The variety of production techniques he employs from song to song on the recording add depth and draw in the listener. Clinton even pulls an obscure 1920s song from gospel singer Washington Phillips that originally featured a mysterious instrument Washington called a "manzarene"—Clinton recreates the instrument's otherworldly sound with his own "collection of antique zithers and some studio trickery."



### I Still Remember June Crying Uncle Bluegrass Band

This record showcases the timeless talent, tone, and evolving taste of this young band that seamlessly weaves jazz, country, pop, and bluegrass influences together in a coherent and compelling musical fabric. This record features covers of David Grisman's "16/16," Steely Dan's "Do It Again," Bob Dylan's "Don't

Think Twice, It's Alright," and Jim Lauderdale's "Sun Won't Go Down," with Jim on the track as a guest performer. Even with these widely varied influences, the album's flavors are remarkably balanced, and the virtuosic performances are deliciously accessible.



### Riding the Rooster 2 Evie Ladin

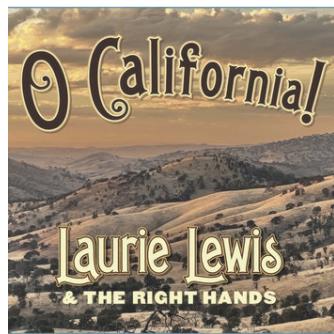
This sequel to the first *Riding the Rooster* is almost entirely made up of duos with Evie's deft banjo playing paired with standout fiddlers from across the country (and Wales and England), including the likes of the Horsenecks' Gabrielle Macrae, Bruce

Molsky, and a menagerie of California fiddlers: Berkeley-based bluegrass legend Laurie Lewis, Elise Engelberg of Skillet Licorice, Grammy-nominated violinist and composer Alisa Rose, San Diego's Clinton Davis, Harry Liedstrand of the Mt. Diablo String Band, and Santa Cruz's Irene Herrmann of The Harmony Sisters. "Once again, I approached this project as a field recording—a good visit, mostly unrehearsed, looking for that vibe, that energy, the beautiful confluence of fiddle and banjo that draws me back into the music forever, no matter how far I take it," Evie shares in the record liner notes. One track is a song by the Evie Ladin Band, with Evie providing vocals and body music accompanied by bass and resophonic guitar. Evie contributes \$1 from every purchase to hurricane relief, in recognition of the debt "this music owes so much to the hills and valleys of Western North Carolina."



## Wild and Clear and Blue I'm With Her

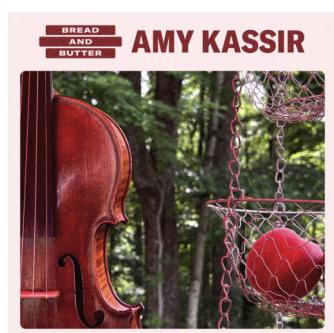
In addition to several other projects, San Diego native Sara Watkins has been playing for the past decade with Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan in acoustic power trio I'm With Her, that this year released their sophomore album eight years after their first release. The record is an 11-song meditation on the powerful sentimentality produced by sparkling production and performance from the creative collaboration of three standout progressive traditionalist acoustic musicians and vocalists. Written in three multi-day work sessions and recorded in two sessions, the album was produced by Josh Kaufman, who Sara has called a "musician's musician," perhaps best known for his work as a member and producer of the Bonnie Light Horsemen. WMOT-FM's Craig Havighurst notes *Wild and Clear and Blue* has more musical layers than the trio's first recording, and more "instrumental luxury." "Find My Way to You" was originally conceived as an instrumental fiddle tune, and ended up as one of the bluegrassiest songs on the record.



## O California! Laurie Lewis & The Right Hands

Laurie says that the songs on her latest release explore places in the natural world and our emotional landscapes. Along with her band The Right Hands—Brandon Godman, George Guthrie, and Hasee Ciaccio—the album (as of this writing only

available on Bandcamp) features five new originals from Laurie, five traditional songs—some with new lyrics—and the beautiful "Sweet South Anna River" written by Laurie's mentor and friend Alice Gerrard. Laurie's top-shelf arrangement and production chops shine through the five-star musical performances.



## Bread and Butter Amy Kassir

Released in late-2024, Amy's record showcases her joyful, driving fiddling. Amy grew up in North Carolina attending fiddlers conventions across the Southeast, went to college in Massachusetts, and arrived in the Bay Area in 2014. Since then, she has performed with many respected

California-based bands including The Crooked Jades, Solid Gold Stranger, B\*Craft, and Bluegrass Holiday. Bread and Butter was produced by Jake Eddy and features 12 tunes, including standards like "Cripple Creek" and "Big Sciota," covers of Paul Shelsky's "China Camp" and John Hartford's "How Can We Love," and the quirky "Wagnerd" from The Horse Flies. "Jake really brought it to life with percussion and a mini accordion—I think it captures the silliness and unhinged energy of 90's Clifftop," Amy wrote about this cut of the tune.

Give these albums a listen on our CBA Spotify playlist here. Support these musicians by buying their albums! →



## So Long Little Miss Sunshine Molly Tuttle

It's likely that this record would not be included in this list if it were released by anyone else; there's nary a track on the record that one would point to as being typical of bluegrass. That's not a bad thing, as the two-time Grammy winner in the bluegrass category clearly has the talent to

stretch into a new sound that builds on her mastery. Molly disbanded her band Golden Highway in May and put together an all-female band to tour this record, produced by Jay Joyce, who himself has a long and distinguished list of country and rock production and songwriting credits under his belt. Writing for *Billboard*, Jessica Nicholson agrees that this record "marks a radical stylistic evolution from her earlier bluegrass-oriented work" and was "built on a bedrock of folk-pop, country, and rock, while still folding in dashes of bluegrass." It's an exciting next step in an already stellar career.



## Suzy Sings Siebel Suzy Thompson

Paul Siebel recorded two excellent albums for Elektra around 1970, "but he had debilitating stage fright, hated the life of a touring musician, and his songwriting dried up, so in the 1980s he left the music world and disappeared," Suzy shared of the

album's muse. His records never reached mainstream fame, but became cult classics in the folk world. This album features 10 tracks penned by Paul, with Suzy mostly playing guitar and singing a tasty blend of country, bluegrass, and folk along with an all-star cast of musicians, including her husband and frequent collaborator Eric Thompson—"with whom I first learned these songs in the mid-1970s. This music was the soundtrack of our courtship," Suzy shared—along with Cindy Cashdollar on Dobro and steel, John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful fame on harmonica, producer and performer Jody Stecher, vocals and kazoo from Kate Brislin (Suzy's bandmate in the Any Old Time Stringband), banjo maven Bill Evans, and the wonderfully ubiquitous Mark Schatz on bass.

**Happy 50th Anniversary, CBA!**

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## BLUEGRASS VENUES

cont'd from front page

Chris Hillman discovered mandolin through the networks of friends and teachers that orbited the club. For these musicians and many others, the Ash Grove provided the direct line to music traditions that California, at the time, lacked.

Just down the street, the Troubadour presented folk and country acts that sometimes included bluegrass-leaning groups like the Dillards, who mixed Southern stringband repertoire with the rising folk boom. In Claremont, the Folk Music Center, founded in 1958, doubled as a store and gathering space where locals learned directly from traveling musicians.

North of Los Angeles, the Topanga Banjo and Fiddle Contest, founded in 1961, became a proving ground for aspiring pickers. In the Bay Area, the Berkeley Folk Festival brought national stars like Monroe and Watson to UC Berkeley's campus from 1958 to 1970. Together, these early platforms established California as a place where bluegrass could take root, and gave local players and audiences a head start when the CBA came on the scene.

### THE GOLDEN ERA OF CLUBS: 1975–1985

The Bay Area had a thriving musical circuit when the CBA was born. Paul's Saloon in San Francisco became the best known. Even though it was a bar first, not a listening room, bands like High Country and the Good Ol' Persons played there regularly. For a decade, Paul's was widely remembered as the home of San Francisco bluegrass.

Across the Bay, the Freight & Salvage offered a bona fide listening room, presenting bluegrass alongside folk from around the world. The Palms Playhouse in Davis—and later, Winters—added another grassroots listening room, first in a converted barn and later in its downtown location. Across the Golden Gate in Mill Valley, the Sweetwater Saloon opened in 1972 and booked a steady stream of folk, bluegrass, and roots musicians, giving Marin County its own intimate listening

room. Like the Palms and Freight, it bridged local pickers with national touring artists.

Smaller venues filled out the map. Laurie Lewis's "Where to Go" columns in early issues of the *Bluegrass Breakdown* included The Townhouse in Emeryville, the Red Vest Pizza Parlor in El Cerrito, and Rosebud's Ice Cream Parlor in Benicia as bluegrass rooms. Pizza parlors and pubs weren't glamorous, but they provided steady gigs and gave fans casual places to hear bluegrass mid-week.

Together, these rooms formed a solid Bay Area circuit. For a time, it was possible to hear live bluegrass pretty much every night without leaving the city.

In the south, the Banjo Cafe in Santa Monica had a glorious reign from 1979–84. Offering live bluegrass six nights a week, with a regular Monday night open mic opportunity for new performers, the Banjo Cafe became the hub of a Southern California Bluegrass Association. Sadly, however, it burned down in 1984.

### CONTINUITY AND TRANSITION: 1990s–2000s

By the late 1980s, the economics of live music had shifted. Festivals were on the rise, and the Bay Area's nightly bluegrass bar circuit began to thin. Paul's closed its doors in 1991, and other taverns and pizza parlors moved away from steady bookings. Rising rents, changing neighborhood pressures, and the availability of cheaper entertainment options like karaoke all made nightly live music harder to sustain. Yet, the tradition carried on elsewhere.

In Southern California, McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica had by then become a must-play room for touring acoustic musicians. Its 150-seat back room presented bluegrass in an intimate, focused setting. Boulevard Music in Culver City and the Fret House in Covina followed a similar model, combining retail with live performance.

The Coffee Gallery Backstage in Altadena, with only 49 seats, became beloved for its cozy atmosphere and steady booking of bluegrass, folk, and Americana until its closure in 2023.



Sandy Rothman (left) and Frank Wakefield (right) at Paul's Saloon in 1978. Photo by Ray Edlund.



McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica. Photo courtesy of McCabe's Guitar Shop.

In Northern California, Fox & Goose Public House in Sacramento and Sam's BBQ in San Jose established themselves as reliable stops for regional bluegrass bands. In Folsom, John and Loretta Hettinger's Folsom Opry House created a reliable house-concert stop for touring bands—John Reischman and the Jaybirds among them—keeping Sacramento's mid-week listening scene vibrant. The Freight & Salvage and Palms Playhouse continued to thrive, anchoring their communities through relocations and ownership changes.

### THE 21ST CENTURY REVIVAL

By the turn of the century, California bluegrass had shifted from raucous barrooms to a patchwork of listening rooms, coffeehouses, and pubs that kept the music alive.

The new millennium—and increased popularity of bluegrass on the heels of the 2000 release of *O Brother, Where Art Thou*—brought a fresh wave of bluegrass-friendly venues. In San Francisco, Amnesia's "Bluegrass Mondays" became a fixture in the scene. For nearly two decades, the weekly mix of booked bands and open jams gave the Mission District a uniquely bluegrass identity, until the club closed in 2020. In Mill Valley, community support brought the Sweetwater back to life in 2012 as Sweetwater Music Hall, carrying forward the tradition of presenting acoustic and roots music in the North Bay. In Santa Cruz, former *Bluegrass Breakdown* editor Mark Varner kicked-off a new concert series at the United Methodist Church called Otter Opry in the early-2000s. The series continues today over in Monterey, led by former CBA board member Larry Phegley at Monterey United Methodist Church.

In Los Angeles, the *Bluegrass Situation* launched when, for five days in May 2010, BGS founder and actor Ed Helms congregated a lineup of bluegrass and roots artists at the storied Largo at the Coronet Theatre. What began as a club series quickly grew into a citywide festival and later a national brand, reframing bluegrass as



Sophia Sparks on mandolin with Della Mae at Sweetwater Music Hall. Photo by John Woodworth.

contemporary and cool while honoring its traditions.

Meanwhile, The Mint in Los Angeles folded bluegrass and newgrass acts into its eclectic programming. Boulevard Music and McCabe's carried on their steady traditions. In San Diego, the San Diego Bluegrass Society maintained a long lineage of jams and concerts at rotating restaurants like Boll Weevil and Fuddruckers. Tucked inside a working metal shop in Huntington Beach, Shutts Fabricators has become Southern California's most unusual bluegrass haven—an industrial, community-run space where welding torches and fiddle tunes share space.

The variety of these modern venues shows how the California scene has adapted: the nightly bar circuit may be gone, but bluegrass continues to thrive in community-minded spaces.

## 50 YEARS OF BLUEGRASS COMMUNITY

Across 50 years of CBA history, California bluegrass has thrived in rooms both reverent and rowdy. The Ash Grove gave the music its first Los Angeles home; Paul's Saloon made a neighborhood bar into a nightly bluegrass destination; Freight & Salvage professionalized the tradition as concert music; pizza parlors and pubs kept it accessible week after week; and newer clubs like Amnesia and Largo reinvented it for the 21st century.

These venues also nurtured the musicians who shaped the music itself. Ry Cooder, Clarence White, and Chris Hillman all found their footing in the folk-bluegrass crucible of the 1960s. Later, California bands like High Country, Vern Williams, and the Good Ol' Persons found steady stages in the state's bars and pizza parlors.

California's bluegrass story isn't just about festivals or institutions. It's about the everyday rooms that made space for the high lonesome sound—barns, bars, coffeehouses, and theaters. As the CBA marks its 50th year, those rooms remind us that the music has always found a home here, wherever players and listeners are willing to gather. 



Laurie Lewis & The Right Hands perform at Otter Opry. Photo by Robin Frenette.

The California Bluegrass Reunion is John Reischman (mandolin), Bill Evans (banjo), Jim Nunally (guitar), Chad Manning (fiddle), Sharon Gilchrist (bass) and Mike Witcher (dobro), true all-stars from the California music scene featuring three CBA life members and a Steve Martin Banjo Prize

winner. For this year's annual tour, the Reunion will feature songs and tunes from California songwriters and Nell & Jim will open for all shows. Join the Reunion for one of these NorCal shows!

**Thursday, November 13 - Sparks, NV**  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 1135 12th Street  
Doors at 6:30 p.m. - [NBBA.org](http://NBBA.org)  
Sponsored by the Northern Nevada Bluegrass Assoc.

**Friday, November 14 - Sacramento, CA**  
The Side Door, 2900 Franklin Blvd.  
7 p.m. show - [thesidedoor.net](http://thesidedoor.net)

**Saturday, November 15 - Santa Rosa, CA**  
The California Theater, 528 7th Street  
7:30 p.m. - [caltheatre.com](http://caltheatre.com)

**Sunday, November 16 - Berkeley, CA**  
The Freight, 2020 Addison Street  
Doors at 6 p.m., 7 p.m. show - [thefreight.org](http://thefreight.org)

**Tuesday, November 18: Monterey, CA**  
The Otter Opry, 1 Soledad Drive  
5:30 p.m. dinner, 7 p.m. show - [otteropry.org](http://otteropry.org)  
Sponsored by the California Bluegrass Association



**Bill Evans Banjo Workshop**  
**Monday, November 17 - Berkeley, CA**  
Manning Music, 758 Gilman Street  
7 to 9 p.m. All ability levels welcome!  
Contact Bill at [bill@billlevansbanjo.com](mailto:bill@billlevansbanjo.com) for more info.

# A GUIDE TO BLUEGRASS CAROLING

by Jason Dilg, Bluegrass Breakdown Managing Editor

It's a chilly December night, the stars are out, and you're walking down a quiet neighborhood street with a crew of friends and neighbors. Someone's wearing a Santa hat, someone else is carrying a fiddle case, and your breath hangs in the air like mist as you launch into "Christmas Time's a-Comin'." Lights flick on, doors crack open, and soon you're giving the gift of music right on the doorstep. Caroling might feel like a tradition from another era, but with a little planning—and a healthy dose of bluegrass spirit—it's a tradition just waiting to be revived for fun and fellowship.

## ••• Recruit Your Crew •••

First step: assemble your merry band. Caroling works best with six to 12 people—enough to fill out the sound without clogging up a sidewalk. Don't worry if not everyone is a singer. The shy ones can hold a candle, shake some bells, or just hum along. Kids add sparkle and energy, and a mix of ages keeps the tradition lively. Think of it as building a jam circle: the real fun is in the variety of personalities and voices.

## ••• Schedule Gatherings •••

A little structure goes a long way. Pick one or two nights in December when the group can actually hit the streets. Weekends are great, but weeknights can work too if you keep things short and sweet. Before then, set up two or three practices. These don't have to feel like rehearsals so much as excuses to get together and enjoy some music and good company. Share cookies, sip cocoa or cider, and run through your songs. The point is less about perfection and more about laughing together as you work out who's singing the bass line and who keeps drifting into melody. By the time caroling night rolls around, everyone will feel confident—and connected.



## ••• Pick Your Songs •••

You'll want a core set of eight-to-10 carols. There are always the classics that people know from memory—like "Silent Night," "Deck the Halls," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," but you can make it a true bluegrass caroling session with some of the many bluegrass Christmans gems from our repertoire. There's a whole bluegrass Christmas playlist on Spotify, and many bluegrass artists have recorded Christmas records. Print lyric sheets or share pdfs for phones, so nobody is stuck humming after the second verse. Keep the set manageable; it's better to sing a handful well than stumble through a song nobody knows.

## ••• Rehearse Your Parts •••

Here's where the magic happens! Many traditional carols come alive in four-part harmony: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. Even if your group isn't used to this kind of singing, breaking it down is pretty straight-forward. Sopranos carry the melody, altos add warmth, tenors brighten, and basses bring that rolling foundation. If you've got someone who reads music, have them bring an instrument—or go to them, if they have a piano—and play each line so singers can hear where their part goes. A little time spent learning those harmonies pays off in musical depth and richness.

Rehearsals don't need to be formal—half the fun is laughing when the bass singer forgets to "bum-bum-bum" or the altos creep up into soprano territory. But give harmony its due. That sweet blend is what makes caroling sparkle, what turns a familiar song into a gift. Think of rehearsal as the jam before the show: essential, but also one of the best parts of the whole thing.



## ••• Showtime! •••

When the big night arrives, gather in one spot, tune up your voices, and head out together. Sing two or three songs at each house—enough to warm hearts, but not so many that your audience starts eyeing the cocoa that's cooling inside. In California, our Decembers are often mild enough that stringed wooden boxes are safe, and the ringing strings of an instrument add a lot to the musical experience!

Etiquette matters: sing, smile, thank your hosts, and move on. Carry a few small percussion toys—bells, tambourines, or spoons—so kids can join in. And remember, it's not about nailing every note. It's about the surprise and delight of live voices on a doorstep, about neighbors remembering that community is as close as a knock on the door.

## ••• The Gift of Bluegrass •••

In the end, caroling isn't about performance. It's about presence—being together, giving something joyful and fleeting. In bluegrass we already know the power of harmony, of voices joining in ways that are greater than the sum of their parts. Caroling is just another way to share that gift.

So this December, gather your friends, dig up some bluegrass Christmas favorites, and take your music to the streets. Under the winter sky, with voices blending in harmony, we are reminded that the simple act of singing together is one of the finest holiday traditions of all.



Need some inspiration for caroling material? Give a listen to the Bluegrass Christmas Playlist by Compass Record Group →



# See you at South State 48!

by Donna Hargis, South State 48 Event Director

Looking forward to its fifth anniversary from November 6–9, South State 48, in the beautiful city of Carlsbad, promises to be the best yet! This free event is packed with workshops, our renowned band contest, lively concerts, and plenty of opportunities for jamming all night long! You don't need to stay at the hotel to participate, but it sure makes things more convenient; check room availability at [www.SouthState48.com](http://www.SouthState48.com).

We're thrilled to welcome a dynamic duo of national guitar flatpicking champions for our workshops and special performance showcase: **Joy Louise and Tyler Grant!** Tyler, a San Diego native, is a recording artist, instructor, and host of the popular Monday Night Jam-along on YouTube. Joy Louise is our flatpickin' powerhouse—be sure to read all about her in the *Breakdown's* March 2024 issue! Both will serve as artists-at-large, leading workshops and jamming sessions on Friday and Saturday in the conference room. Don't miss the

chance to see them perform together in the Windmill—a fiery display of virtuosity when two guitar-loving maestros share the stage!

We're also excited to announce **Bay Area Special** as our featured band for South State 48 Vol. VI! Based near San Jose, the band's influences include legends like J.D. Crowe, Tony Rice, Hazel Dickens, and Alice Gerrard. Their performance will showcase sweet vocals, fiddle tunes, incredible instrument solos, and true bluegrass spirit. Catch Bay Area Special on Saturday night, November 9, at the Windmill Foodhall next to the hotel. This concert is free and open to everyone—hotel guests and locals alike!

Should your band open for Bay Area Special? The winner of our Friday night band contest will get to perform as the opening act for Saturday's show. We've revived this popular contest, giving talented bands and performers the chance to take the stage and shine!

Friday and Saturday during the day, the Open Jam Tent will be buzzing with curated jam sessions Saturday and Sunday. Featuring a variety of themes and tempos, these open jams are perfect for all skill levels. Come warm up, connect with fellow musicians, and keep the bluegrass spirit alive all night long!

Visit [SouthState48.com](http://SouthState48.com) for event details, workshop schedule, hotel and dining info, and more!



November 6–9, 2025  
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Jamming in the courtyard at SS48 in 2024. Photo by Robin Frenette.

CALIFORNIA BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION



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flat-pick and rhythm guitar; bluegrass mandolin; bluegrass and old-time banjo; upright bass; band dynamics; harmony vocals, and many other specialized workshops.

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# CBA HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE



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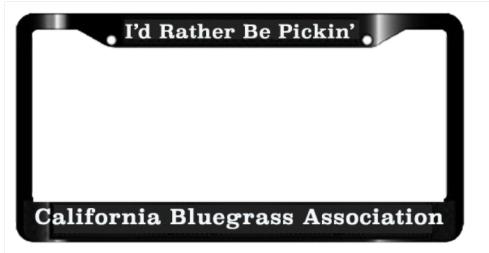
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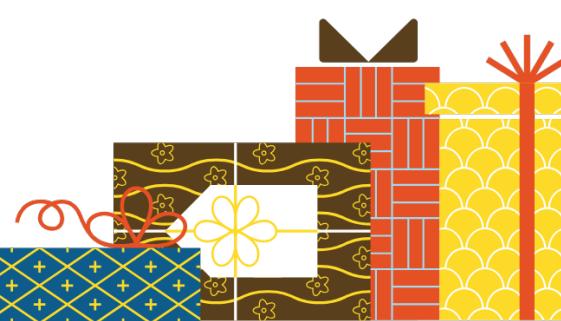
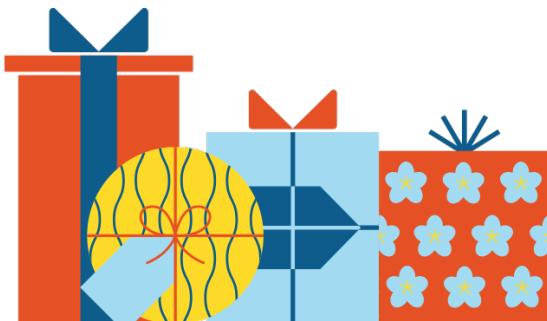
## CBA Holiday Ornament

Celebrate California bluegrass spirit during this holidays with this festive ornament—perfect for music lovers and pickers alike. A timeless keepsake!



## California Bluegrass Bandanas

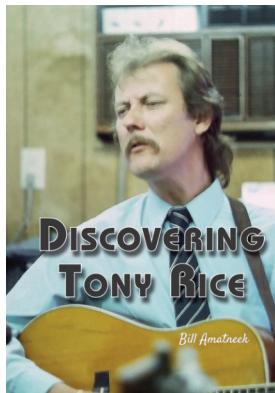
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# GIFT IDEAS FROM OUR SPONSORS



## Discovering Tony Rice

by Bill Amatneek

This captivating oral biography of Tony Rice, our era's foremost bluegrass guitarist, delves into never before heard truths about the musical genius, giving readers an intimate understanding of Tony and his musical journey. Signed by the author.

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# BLUEGRASS BREAKDOWN

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



Nov/Dec  
2025



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SS48, NOVEMBER 6-9

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## SAVE THE DATE!



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By Bert Daniel, Breakdown Contributor

Back in September, summer was coming to a close, and we were thinking about bluegrass's global reach, as the first IBMA in Chattanooga was just a few weeks away. We asked: **“These brothers founded the first Japanese bluegrass band in 1957. Name the band.”**

Yasushi and Hisashi Ozaki, aka the Ozaki Brothers, founded the **East Mountain Boys** in 1957 in Japan. In a 2004 interview, Yasushi, who was born in Kyoto in 1931, recalled coming upon a record player in his dad's closet at the age of 12. When he put a record on, “She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain” came through the speaker. “That changed my life,” Yasushi remembered. The music the brothers made obviously left a big impression on California Bluegrass; Danny “Hootenanny” Clark, Renee Eberle, Steve Goldfield, Jokie Michel, Roy Barush, Mary Rimsans, Bill Amatneek, Judy Forrest, Mike Howard, Jon DeLong, and Annie Staninec, all responded with the correct band name!

Danny also shared: “I was part of a team that hosted them while they were at IBMA receiving their distinguished achievement award. At the time, I was working for the bluegrass museum in Owensboro, Kentucky, and was fascinated by their story. The Ozaki Brothers

told me that during WWII they would hide in their father's closet and listen to Roy Acuff records in secret.”

We visited the Google random number generator to pick a winner for this month's contest, and **Annie Staninec** wins our rare CBA logo glass pint beer mug!

## NOV/DEC TRIVIA

For our holiday issue, we thought we'd have a little fun! We want to know **who once sent out bogus Christmas cards—allegedly featuring a naked Ray Park wearing a strategically-placed guitar and a cowboy hat tipped so low you couldn't recognize his face, and signed “Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year! Ray Park.”**

Send your answer to:  
[trivia@californiabluegrass.net](mailto:trivia@californiabluegrass.net)  
no later than November 30.

This month's prize is a lovely CBA bandana—one of the most versatile prizes imaginable!

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 January 2026 issue of the *Bluegrass Breakdown*.