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Never Come Down info,  
Remembering "Cookie Lady",  
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and more...



*Oregon Bluegrass Association*  
www.oregonbluegrass.org

# Bluegrass *Express*

## Never Come Down Wins FreshGrass Band Competition

*Band interview with Linda Leavitt*

**D**uring the last weekend of September, Portland's own Never Come Down (NCD) won the band competition at the 2021 FreshGrass Festival in North Adams, Massachusetts. The band was chosen by "a jury of festival musicians and industry experts," according to the festival website, [freshgrass.com](http://freshgrass.com). The competition is specifically for musicians who are "performing music that is deeply informed by bluegrass even as it tests boundaries." The winners were "selected on the basis of compositional originality, instrumental and vocal skills, stage presence and performance, and proficiency in the tradition."

As grand prize winners, Never Come Down will perform at the 2022 FreshGrass Festival and will record a session at Alison Brown's Compass Records.

FreshGrass is a non-profit organization that produces the FreshGrass festival series, publishes No Depression magazine and administers the annual Steve Martin Banjo Prize.

After a whirlwind cross-country summer tour that included dates in Las Vegas, AmericanaFest in Nashville and their return to RockyGrass to perform on the

grass Music Awards, and asked what's next for them.

Linda: How do you feel?



*Never Come Down: Kaden Hurst, Joe Suskind, Crystal Lariza, Brian Alley, Ben Ticknor*

main stage, the folks in Never Come Down will finally get a much-needed respite after their IBMA showcases. I caught up via Zoom with three band members, Joe Suskind, Crystal Lariza, and Kaden Hurst, shortly after they'd arrived in Raleigh, North Carolina for the International Blue-

Joe: Floating. We feel like we're being carried.

Linda: Well, you're certainly being guided.

Joe: Yes!

Linda: Where are you now?

Joe: We're at IBMA, in the Raleigh Convention Center downstairs. We just did "speed dating" with different festivals, and now we're in between things and taking a breath.

Linda: How did you decide to enter the FreshGrass Festival competition?

Kaden: I think it was Brian (Alley) who took it upon himself and said "I think we should apply for this."

We were talking to Brad Kolodner who runs the Baltimore Old Time Festival. He's on the IBMA board now, and we were talking to him about how we need to get into the New England/East Coast scene. Brad recommended we try to get into

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# OBA Membership & Ad Information

## Membership Information

The OBA Board of Directors invites you to join the OBA and to participate in its many activities. Our membership benefits include a subscription to the quarterly Bluegrass Express, frequent mailings about events, and ticket discounts to northwest bluegrass events. Annual membership dues are \$30 for a General Member, \$50 for Supporting Performers, and \$125 for Contributing Business Sponsors, as well as other options. You can join online or complete the application on the back cover and mail your check to:

**Oregon Bluegrass Association**  
P.O. Box 1115  
Portland, OR 97207

## Website

Features include an interactive calendar that allows you to post your own events, excerpts from past issues of the Bluegrass Express, and links for local bands. Come visit us online! Visit the OBA web page today!

[www.oregonbluegrass.org](http://www.oregonbluegrass.org)

## Article and Editorial Submissions

The OBA Board invites you to submit letters, stories, photos and articles to The Bluegrass Express. Published files remain in our archives and art is returned upon request. Please send submissions to:

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When submitting an advertisement to the OBA, please be sure the ad is accurate and the file is black and white, 300 dpi and in either PDF, TIFF, or JPEG format. If you have questions about your file please email John Nice-Snowdy at [nicetunz@gmail.com](mailto:nicetunz@gmail.com).

You can also find the OBA on Instagram and Facebook! "Like" our page and keep up to date with bluegrass events.

Founded in 1982, the Oregon Bluegrass Association (OBA) is a volunteer-run, 501(c) (3), non-profit arts organization consisting of individual and band memberships. Based in Portland, Oregon, the OBA has a chapter in Roseburg, and is the umbrella organization for the Chick Rose School of Bluegrass.

The OBA is led by an elected Board of Directors who volunteer for two-year terms. Monthly meetings are open to all members and an Annual Meeting is held for the state-wide and regional members. Financial support for the OBA comes from membership dues, fundraising events, tax-deductible donations, merchandise sales and advertising revenue from the Bluegrass Express, the award-winning member newsletter.

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*Oregon Bluegrass Association*  
[www.oregonbluegrass.org](http://www.oregonbluegrass.org)

## **Bluegrass Express**

*Bluegrass Express* is a quarterly newsletter dedicated to informing members of the Oregon Bluegrass Association about local, regional and national bluegrass issues, events and opportunities.

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# President's Message

So many farewells: Byron Berline... Tom T. Hall... Bill Emerson. And those are just the most well-known names to whom we've sent wishes for a safe final journey this summer. There are many more, too, of lesser stature but whose influence was undeniable.

I'll miss Fern Anderson, the Cookie Lady, too. That's bluegrass, Pacific Northwest style, without picking a note. I was first offered one of Fern's cookies during a Prairie Flyer set at a festival in Detroit, Oregon sometime in the early aughts. It's one of those things that holds our diverse bluegrass family together.

The good news is that we managed to pull off a few festivals this summer—safely and with the excitement and companionship we expect from big, ambitious events. There isn't space here to thank all the people who had the courage to take the financial risk of hosting a bluegrass festival under pandemic conditions, but my hat is off to all of them on behalf of all of us who were able to attend. I hasten to include the promoters who wisely chose to cancel when conditions did not show a clear path to a safe event.

I'm pleased to report that all of you who purchased memberships during the Summer, at the festivals and on the OBA web site, have "bent the curve," as the pandemic has taught us to say, of declining participation in the Association that I mentioned in the last Bluegrass Express issue.

I would like to suggest two other ways that you can participate in and support the OBA. Our friends at Wintergrass are hard at work planning a safe and fun festival for 2022. The OBA leadership has been working with them to develop how our part of the festivities, the "jam street" of suites that regional associations sponsor will be integrated into the safe and fun whole. A donation, however modest, at the Support Wintergrass Suite button on our web site will make a big difference in our ability to host the jamming, events, and showcases that we're famous for. We thank you in advance for your contribution.

So, here's a question: Which part of the Association's operations hasn't missed a lick since March 2020? Well, you'd be right if you guessed the Bluegrass Express, and we're deeply grateful to Linda Leavitt and her team for raising the bar with each issue.

But you'd also be right if you chose OBA Radio. Patrick Connell and Kaden Hurst have kept the station going 24 hours a day all through the pandemic. And just check out the playlist! We have recently begun keeping track of listener statistics, and this is a curve just asking to be bent. This is not the same thirty or forty songs on shuffle. The OBA Radio library contains thousands of songs. It's just a click away on our web site.

And while you're there, you might notice the Join OBA and Wintergrass Suite buttons. Just sayin'.

Until we meet again, my wholehearted thanks for your support,

*Chris*  
Chris Knight  
OBA President



Photo By Doug Olmstead

## What's Playing On The Radio

Local Radio Bluegrass and Country Listings

### Everywhere And Free

Oregon Bluegrass Radio  
[www.oregonbluegrass.org](http://www.oregonbluegrass.org)  
Every day, all day

### Albany/Corvallis - KBOO

Broadcast from Portland, can be heard at 100.7 FM. See under Portland, below

### Astoria - KMUN 91.9 FM

Some syndicated programming  
503-325-0010

"Cafe Vaquera"

Tuesdays 9-11pm, Bluegrass/Old Timey  
Western/Folk with Calamity Jane  
[CafeVaquera@hotmail.com](mailto:CafeVaquera@hotmail.com)

"Shady Grove" Saturdays 7-9pm  
Regular folk program

Monday thru Friday 10am - noon  
with bluegrass included

### Columbia Gorge - KBOO

Broadcast from Portland. Can be heard at 92.7 FM. See under Portland below

### Corvallis - KOAC 550 AM

Syndicated public radio with some bluegrass included in regular programming  
541-737-4311

### Eugene - KLCC 89.7 FM

Local broadcast 541-726-2224  
Mixed format "Saturday Cafe"  
Saturdays 11am - noon  
"The Backporch"  
9 - 10pm Saturdays

### Eugene - KRVM 91.9 FM

"Routes & Branches" 3 - 5pm Saturdays  
"Acoustic Junction" 5 - 7pm Saturdays  
"Miles of Bluegrass" 7 - 9pm Mondays  
[www.krvm.org](http://www.krvm.org) 541-687-3370

### Pendleton - KWHT 104.5 FM

"Bushels of Bluegrass" 9 - 11pm Sundays  
contact Phil Hodgen 541-276-2476

### Portland - KBOO 90.7 FM

"Music from the True Vine"  
9am - noon Saturdays

### Santiam Canyon - KYAC 94.9 FM

"Ken 'til 10" 6-10am M-F

Additional Bluegrass Programming  
Streaming and Schedule: [www.kyacfm.org](http://www.kyacfm.org)

### Salem - KMUZ 88.5 & 100.7

"Ken 'til 10" 6-8am M-F  
Simulcast with KYAC.  
[kmuz.org](http://kmuz.org), all bluegrass



# Never Come Down

cont. from page 1

FreshGrass. We signed up for the band contest.

Joe: When our new album came out (earlier in 2021), we got all of these addresses from radio stations, and we sent out emails with our stuff. Brad was the only guy who responded. He said "You guys sound cool, let's do an interview." After the interview, he said we should enter FreshGrass.

Kaden: So we applied, and sent FreshGrass a couple of videos, a traditional bluegrass song and an original. We were in Sisters at the time we applied.

(Two weeks later, they learned they were selected for the FreshGrass competition.)

Kaden: At RockyGrass (where in 2019 NCD won the band contest), we competed with 11 bands in two rounds. At FreshGrass, the competition involved three bands, one round, two songs each.

Crystal: The competition happened so fast!

Linda: How did you choose the songs? Did you pick them on the fly?

Joe: We had to play a traditional song, so we did "Doin' Time." That song is powerful and fast, all of the things you want in a traditional bluegrass song. Then we chose



*Never Come Down performing in the FreshGrass band competition*

to sing "Mother," which is our favorite new original that we perform now. I think we played it at Maggie Jackson's house concert in Sisters last summer. Brian plays clawhammer on that song. We filmed those two for the audition and we were going to play something different, but those were the two that seemed most natural and we went with what felt good.

Linda: Would you tell me about your deal with Alison Brown's Compass Records? Is that recording date part of the prize you won at FreshGrass?

Joe: Yes, we'll do one recording with Compass, half a day. We're not exactly sure what that means, but it is a deal

with Compass, for this one record. It's not as if they're signing us as an artist, but this is our door. There's going to be a record that we're on.

Linda: That's a very prestigious door! Well, congratulations! Also, you're playing at IBMA in a showcase, and that's another great opportunity.

Joe: Yeah! Last night we played a pre-party with Henhouse Prowlers and Stillhouse Junkies, which was fun, and today we have two showcases, one at a venue and one here at the convention center. Then

we're done for the whole week, and we'll get to hang out and meet people. After today, we're off duty and we'll have a free-for-all, which is awesome, because it has been kind of a run.

Linda: Crystal looks like she's ready to break loose a little bit.

Crystal: I'm excited to not have a schedule and to be able to pick with different people and go into the rooms and stay up late listening to music, and to not have to get up so early!

Linda: Last summer, I heard you play several new songs. Will you have a new album coming out soon?

Joe: Not yet. We're still getting our last album out there, *Better Late Than Never*, which has just come out in vinyl. The vinyl recording sounds so much better than on CD or on Spotify. It's like night and day. We're excited about the vinyl version and we have some with us to sell at our shows and to hand out to people who really want to hear it.

Linda: And people can buy those on



*On the MainStage at 2021 RockyGrass*

# Never Come Down

your website?

Joe: Yes, we have some family back home shipping them, so if you order one now, you'll get it right away.

Linda: Hearing you live is such a wonderful experience. I can't wait to hear the vinyl version of *Better Late Than Never*.

Gareth Jenkins has a question for you: How have your individual approaches to music changed along the path of playing together?

Crystal: That's a good one! Personally, I feel the biggest thing that's changed is we all, in a way, do less, but it equals more. We get out of the way of each other, and our approach is for the good of the many, rather than the few. That's how it feels. By doing that, and having that space in the band to hear everybody play whatever it is we need to be playing, whether Kaden's doing a different kind of solo, or Ben's arranging a tune in a completely different way, giving everyone the shot to do that, I feel like we each have more individual control even though we're doing less. We're making more space for each other, and being able to all be heard in the music has been really huge for us.

Joe: We make space for each other and people have been making space for us. As long as we take care of each other, it feels like we're going to get taken care of.

Kaden: Right, and our grip on the traditional way of playing bluegrass has been loosening. Instead of thinking "okay, I'm going to play a chop," there are huge sections, for instance on "Too Hot to Handle," where I'm just playing a chord, letting it



*Never Come Down, with Hilarie Spangler of FreshGrass Foundation*

ring, and then hanging out, and not trying to drive the thing at all. That's been super fun, to have the freedom to know everyone else in the band has got it enough so that nobody is tied to one role. That's been a huge musical door that's been slowly opening for us.

Linda: Still, the rhythmic drive of your music sounds bluegrass to me, and it is all of you, this interplay that's keeping the

drive going. Your vocals drive the music, too. You give space to each other and you're so cohesive, it's like you're reading each other's minds.

Joe: It's the single mic.

Crystal: It's not so much reading each other's minds as it is really listening to each other. We've had some really cool feedback during our little tour. People come up and say "It's like you're really listening to each other," and we really are! The audience is really listening, and we appreciate that.

Kaden: You wouldn't think that it would be so rare to hear, "Oh, you're really listening!" But it is remarkably easy to get by without doing that.

Joe: We're not going to settle for just getting by. It's not about getting by. It's about the best way we can make space for each other.

It's all about tone, for me. The thing that stands out to me, it's my gut feeling about tone, and literally the tone of the instruments, our tone as a band, and tone in how we treat each other, that's what's important. Anybody can play the same

bluegrass lick or a score of music, but it is tone that separates in intent, and that has become the foreground. We ask "What is the tone? What is the intent? Let's go there."

It means cutting away my personal stuff. I can hand it over to Kaden, I can hand it over to Crystal and there is complete trust.

Linda: It sounds like they take the time to understand and really honor what you're doing. I'd like to say how



*On the MainStage at 2021 RockyGrass*



# Never Come Down

much I appreciate the tone of your vocals, too, individually and as a unit. They're remarkable, and that doesn't happen consistently with other bands.

Crystal: Well, it's scary, you know. We've been making more space in the songs and literally there is dead space. We're coming together to work on vocal harmonies now. We didn't do that before, but now we're taking the time to work on vocals because we want to be better singers, because it's really about what we're singing and what we're saying that matters. The music is beautiful, but that's just the nest for the vocal eggs.

Linda: I love that!

I have two more questions. I know you've got to get ready for your showcases, so I'll be brief. First, where do you go next? I know it's probably not Disneyland. Second, will you still remember us when

you're rich and famous?

(Laughter)

Joe: What's next for us is our Mississippi Studios show on December 3. That's going to be our first and only Portland show for a while.

Crystal: That show will be the official Better Late Than Never vinyl release. The Ben Larsen Band will open for us.

Joe: Also what's next is our recording project for Compass Records.

Crystal: After that, we'll play at Wintergrass.

Joe: Here's some cool news! Two years after our (March 2020) Old Church show, we'll split the bill with Mr. Sun: Never Come Down and Mr. Sun. Darol Anger reached out to us specifically. They want

to play with us when they're in Portland. So lots of things are happening for us, and what's cool is it's not a bunch of little things like before, what's happening is very big opportunities that feel important.

Linda: It's great how opportunities are opening and building for you. The pandemic has been a challenging time for musicians, but you all keep moving.

So...will you remember all of us when you're famous?

Joe: Absolutely! We're coming home. Don't you worry.

*You can learn more about Never Come Down and purchase their latest recording, Better Late Than Never, at [Nevercomedownband.com](http://Nevercomedownband.com). You can find tickets for their vinyl release show at Mississippi Studios at [mississippistudios.com](http://mississippistudios.com).*



*Never Come Down performs at 2021 IBMA Showcase (Photo credit Tara Linhardt)*



*Never Come Down & their trusty bus*

# CD Review: *Never Come Down - Better Late Than Never*

CD Review by Gareth Jenkins

**T**here are just as many ways to express oneself through music as there are musical influences, abilities to play and sing, and inspirations that you are gifted from others. The Portland/Hood River-based band Never Come Down (NCD) is a good case in point, and their latest release, *Better Late Than Never*, is the fruit of their combined efforts.

Consisting of five talented musicians from different musical backgrounds who have come together through a shared love for the inspirations that they provide each other, they have created a combined sound that is a mature blend of these factors.

Gifted with strong original songwriting talent, expert musicianship, beautiful vocal harmonies and a well-developed ear for exciting arrangements and band dynamics, this is a band that has a bright future.

That future started to be realized in 2019 when they entered the prestigious band competition at the hugely popular Rocky Grass festival in Lyons, Colorado and found themselves walking away with first prize (over some supremely talented bands) and a spot on the main stage the following year.

Unfortunately, as you all know, a certain pesky virus disrupted life and the 2020 festival was canceled, as was NCD's chance to tour and further cement their name on the circuit. However, they productively spent their time refining their sound, creating new music and recording, and finally returned this summer to Lyons and performed on the main stage before the appreciative sold-out crowd. They have also managed a few smaller tours in their "new" tour bus in support of their CD.

*Better Late Than Never*, their second release following 2019's self-titled CD, presents the band in a manner that is rep-

resentative of what they sound like live, a conscious effort on their part. With Crystal Lariza and Joe Suskind providing much of the original material and vocals, they show their love for bluegrass and other acoustic music styles, but also their singer/songwriter talents.

The title track is a perfect example of what the band can do. The arrangement and sense of band dynamics are clear, support-



ive, and provide a building sense of tension as Crystal sings over the interweaving instrumentation. The overall effect is one where the lyrics, instrumentation, arrangement and vocals are all in a balance that supports the song. This is mature music, superbly recorded.

"New Year's Day Blues" is a change-of-pace song sung again by Crystal in a loping late-night stroll style that is once again supported by excellent solos by Joe on guitar, Kaden Hurst on mandolin, Brian Alley on banjo and the dynamic rock-solid bass work of Ben Ticknor underpinning everything.

Their instrumental prowess can be found throughout the CD but especially on the Kaden Hurst original, "Whippersnapper," which is a high-speed tip of the hat to all of those young shredders that one encounters

at festivals and who make you want to put your instrument away. Kaden and Ben lead off, quickly followed by Brian, and then the whole band dives in with excellent solos by Brian, Joe and Kaden.

"Leavin'" showcases Joe's emotive songwriting and singing talents, and its arrangement provides another opportunity to render an expressive performance filled with fine solos, more wonderful band dynamics and heartfelt vocals.

Throughout the CD, Joe's guitar playing is of special note. Honed over many years of jam sessions (including the Ranger Station sessions he hosted and where the band in large part came together) and his work at Adam Chowning's Nashville Flatpick Camp (alongside such luminaries as Kenny Smith, Jake Workman, David Grier, Wyatt Rice, and Russ Barenberg).

Of course, a CD is no more than a snapshot in time of where the performers were at the time of the recording and this snapshot is one that will be returned to, time and time again, as you discover new things with each listening. NCD has also been busy creating new material that they hope to put down in the studio and share with all of us in the near future and live on stages when COVID-19 allows.

This is a band that is going places and one that takes their music making seriously, while also allowing their love for it and each other to shine through. We have many more discoveries to look forward to from this talented band. Stay tuned.

*Gareth Jenkins lives near Sisters, Oregon where he builds guitars. You can hear Gareth on the third Saturday of each month on Music from the True Vine on KBOO-FM radio, 90.7, or listen online at kboo.fm.*



This article appeared in *Bluegrass Unlimited* August 2021 (Vol. 56, No. 2) and is reprinted here with permission.

**W**hen pickers meet at festivals, good things often happen. After jamming together at Michigan's Charlotte Bluegrass Festival, Eric Langejans and Todd Kirchner formed the contemporary bluegrass outfit Full Cord in 2008. "We wanted to have fun playing something unique and interesting," says Kirchner. "Eric came up with the name when he noticed the band had a full cord of wood on stage." For the past 14 years, Full Cord has built a solid base of dedicated fans by blending bluegrass with jazz, western swing, and rock while keeping the traditional bluegrass feel alive and well.

Todd Kirchner grew up attending bluegrass festivals and picking with his father and brothers. As a young teen, he got his first upright bass as a Christmas gift. Kirchner now plays an instrument custom built to his specifications by the Upton Bass Co. in Mystic, Connecticut.

A self-professed "techie," Kirchner builds or restores 3-D printers, teletype and pinball machines in his spare time. "I'd encourage every band to hire a pro engineer. Squeeze the budget. Make it work. It's worth every penny." Kirchner runs sound for Full Cord, and he's developed an inexpensive way for the band to have its own on-stage mixing board and wireless in-ear monitors. "If we're at the mercy of a sound guy, we can't control our sound on stage. It's not where we needed to be to perform our best. So we bring our own board and develop our own mix."

Eric Langejans plays guitar, mandolin, and fiddle, although he now sticks mainly to guitar with Full Cord. "As a kid, I tolerated what my dad listened to ... Stanley Brothers, Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs. Through high school, I was a Deadhead, and a friend loaned me a CD of *Old and in the Way*. Within two months of hearing it, I

bought a mandolin. Everyone was playing guitar so I took up mandolin and never looked back." Affectionately called "Fast Eric" for his lightning licks, he's played in several bands including Down Home (mandolin, fiddle) and Woodpile (mandolin). "He's the wild card," says Kirchner, "and I call him funny man."

Full Cord's original lineup also included Todd's wife, Katie, on fiddle, and Luke Gitchel on banjo. After a few years, Gitchel

spirit. Langejans had a hand in writing "Gainesville Rain" and "Wallflower," two songs with poignant lyrics that are delivered in a relaxed, convincing way. *Choreomania* continues to get rave reviews and won Michigan station WYCE's 2019 Jammie Award for Best New Album by a New Band. For some gigs at that time, the band also included banjo player Matthew Davis, but he's since gone off to seminary to become a Catholic priest.



Fiddler Grant Flick, from Bowling Green, Ohio, started playing violin in fifth grade orchestra but got involved in bluegrass with his dad who plays banjo, guitar, and Dobro. Within his first month of fiddling, he was learning tunes by ear and going to jams. Today, Flick plays violin, mandolin, tenor guitar, tenor banjo, and nyckelharpa. His primary interests are bluegrass, jazz, swing and new acoustic music. His fiddle, made by Gary Bartig in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is an Old No. 54 model, acoustic-electric that sounds great plugged in or in a hall.

went to work at Dollywood, and Todd's dad, Paul Kirchner, joined on banjo. Todd's father had played bluegrass for decades, including a stint in the seventies with the Pine River Valley Boys, a group that recorded on Homestead Records. Full Cord put out their first album, *Ready to Burn*, in 2009. In 2018, they wanted to go into the studio again before Paul Kirchner retired from playing music, and *Chop* was released.

With six original songs, Full Cord's *Choreomania* album was recorded live in 2019. Besides Todd and Eric, the band had evolved to include Brian Oberlin (mandolin) and Grant Flick (fiddle). A master mandolinist, Oberlin's also a prolific songwriter who contributed three originals ("Boneyard Vamp," "Cajun Mandolin," "Leadfoot") to that album. Flick penned "Road to Tavistock," a snappy instrumental with plenty of old-time

A full-time musician, Flick also plays with Westbound Situation and performs in a couple duos, with bassist Jacob Warren or violinist Hannah O'Brien. Recipient of the 2013 Daniel Pearl Memorial Violin, Flick also gives lessons, presents workshops, competes in fiddle contests, and attends University of Michigan in pursuit of his Master's degree in jazz studies. "Remote recording projects have been fun during COVID times too," says Flick. "I like having the variety as it keeps everything pretty fresh." He somehow even found time to finish third at the 2019 World Crokinole Championship, a sport where players flick small discs into the center hole of the game board or into higher value fields.

Also a full-time musician, internationally acclaimed mandolinist and educator, Brian Oberlin has performed and recorded swing, bluegrass, and Italian classical music. Released in 2016, his 20<sup>th</sup> album

# Full Cord Bluegrass

*Troubadour* features Oberlin singing and playing solo with his Collings mandolin. A few of his collaborations have included The Journeymen, Grasshopah, Ida Viper, GER Mandolin Orchestra (with Mike Marshall), and Twin Mandolin Slingers (with Evan J. Marshall). Oberlin founded the River of the West Mandolin Camp, Great Lakes Mandolin Camp, Oregon Mandolin Orchestra and Michigan Mandolin Orchestra. He's performed and taught at various festivals and academies in the U.S., Italy and Germany. The indefatigable musician always has several projects in the works. "I've got an idea to start a western swing band in Michigan," laughs Oberlin, "and someday, I'd like to do some solo and bluegrass shows in Japan."

Full Cord's newest member is Lloyd Douglas, from Alpena, Michigan, a railroad engineer who grew up performing with his father and brother. "I was born to roll," states Douglas who has played banjo, guitar, fiddle and mandolin in several bluegrass, country rock, jazz, and blues bands. He was a member of the Michigan-based bluegrass band, Detour, and appears on their albums released between 2009 and 2014 on the BlueGrass Ahead and Mountain Fever labels. While with David Davis & the Warrior River Boys, he recorded on the famed *Basement Tapes* for WAMU deejay Ray Davis. As a member of Jim & Jesse and the Virginia Boys, Douglas performed at the Grand Ole Opry.

Filling in with Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper, Douglas played his 1972 Gibson RB-250 on Cleveland's Grammy-nominated album *Fiddler's Dream*. "I got that banjo when I was ten. It's still my main instrument and has a great tone" declares Douglas. He especially enjoys playing the originals that members of Full Cord have written. "Having such talented writers is a blessing. It's special to be able to be a part of creating new original music. You're making a statement."

Making every performance memorable, Full Cord is now at the top of their game and gaining momentum fast. Hold on to your hats when these guys hit the stage. With axes in hand, these guys quickly ig-

nite a crowd with combustible music and leave them in a cloud of sawdust, smoke, ash and embers by the end of a fiery show.

"We've had different musicians come and go," states Kirchner. "To really get tight



and nurture that camaraderie, you need guys to stick around, hang out, work and have fun. We're all good friends, and some of us play disc golf or fish together. I think the band has solidified with this lineup."

Brian, Eric and Todd get together every weekend to woodshed and work on new tunes. Grant and Lloyd join them once a month. Song arrangements become collaborative efforts. "The lyrics are usually written by Brian while Grant does much of the instrumentation," says Kirchner. "Grant might say 'Hey, watch this!' and the other guys pick up on it. We believe we can do anything we want to do. If we have an idea, we just play it. Sometimes it takes a few tries to get it right. After all, we are human."



Full Cord puts a lot of emphasis on creative, enjoyable music. "Our challenge is to keep the music interesting," says Kirchner, "by always introducing new music and arrangements. After five or six shows, we tend to move on to new stuff."

They proactively dealt with the 2020 pandemic. "Some bands shut down while others seemed to embrace it. We took the approach, 'Let's go out and play safely at outdoor shows.' We played a lot of socially distanced outdoor private parties. People were clamoring for live music. We tried to stay relevant on-line. We didn't have a public face but kept the social media and virtual concerts happening. We knew better times were a-comin', and we stayed away from politics. We want to appeal to as broad an audience as we can."

"We have quite a few really loyal fans that come out to shows all the time," observes Kirchner. "It's been snowballing, and people have been flocking to our shows." Concentrating on enjoyable original material, Full Cord's fourth studio album, *Hindsight*, is a tongue-in-cheek reference to their focused efforts during 2020. Their hard-working manager, Katie Kirchner, also provides some vocals on the album that's chock-full of exceptional musicianship, eclectic repertoire and inventive arrangements. With selections like "Downtown" and "Rogue River Valley," it's no surprise that Full Cord won the February ROMP Festival virtual band competition produced by the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum in Owensboro, Kentucky.

"'Downtown' is about a bluegrasser going downtown and about my time spent in Portland, Oregon (2005-2017)," states Oberlin, "I wanted a song that still had a bit of a bluegrass chord progression but had a 'city slicker' chord progression as well. 'Rogue River Valley' is a bluegrass duet I sing with Eric about the pandemic. The premise is that when live music and normalcy can return to society, let it first come to the Rogue River Valley which is in Rockford, Michigan, my hometown. *Songs in the fields and from over the hill. Played on an old wooden stage. Heard*



# Full Cord Bluegrass

*through the pines a lonesome melody. That will only sweeten with age.*"

As Full Cord's primary songwriter and affable lead vocalist, Oberlin is equally as comfortable with rollicking numbers like "Silvertone Blues" as he is with a mel-lower "Daydream Dance" and 3/4-time "Abilene." Oberlin's self-penned western swing tongue-twister, "Mandolin's Dream" will surely make you smile. "With that tune, I was going for a John Hartford silly lyrics approach with a fiddle tune feel," says Oberlin. Katie Kirchner adds high harmony in the three-part call-and-response on "Valentine," another of Oberlin's self-penned songs that conveys a driving, traditional bluegrass ethos. For the album, Langejans wrote and sings lead on "Lincoln River." "I lived along the Lincoln River on 48 acres," recalls Eric. "My dad and I had a sawmill, and it's basically a song about home and nature." Some other *Hindsight* highlights include "Right in Step" and "Hey Watch This," songs that Flick had a hand in composing. On "Right in Step," he plays a five-string octave tenor guitar built by Jim Schenk in Goshen, Indiana. "Right in Step" is a song about a love affair with music, and it was the first collaborative songwriting effort for Flick and Oberlin. Flick explains how he writes for members of the group. "Typically, I think of the people that will be playing the tune and write something that fits their musical voice while also offering some sort of vehicle for improvisation. I don't want to impose a sound that isn't there but rather use a composition as a question the musicians can answer. Often, giving this freedom leads to better results and more authentic material."

While their 2020 vision was to produce *Hindsight*, Full Cord's plans for the future show great foresight. "We really want the band to succeed and get the music out to everybody," remarks Kirchner. "Our goal is to make really great music and have people enjoy it." Oberlin says the band will play some fantastic festivals, glorious concert venues and share their music as far as it seems fit. Flick adds, "we'll keep going on the current path. It's been a fun trajectory to jump onto."

Eric Langejans agrees. "I get to do what I love, and people love what I do. It's a big reward for me. If it ever gets to not be fun, I don't want to do it. This band has the perfect balance of people. You couldn't ask for a better group of guys. I'm honored to play with them. They're my brothers."

Full Cord is an eclectic quintet with all the necessary chops, good chemistry and business acumen to take them far. They have varied musical tastes and the ability to present them all well. *Bluegrass Unlimited* predicts that their direction and discipline will make a real positive impact on the



new acoustic and bluegrass music scene.

This summer, Full Cord will be very busy playing venues throughout Michigan. Enroute, you'll also find them on many of the Wolverine State's most challenging disc golf courses. "We love to disc golf," says Oberlin, "and Full Cord challenges any band to a disc golf mini tournament." In September, Full Cord will play the 2021 ROMP Festival in Owensboro. Based on the venue or gig, Full Cord's band members perform in various configurations from solo to quintet. In such cases, *Bluegrass Unlimited* is uncertain whether they'll then be called a rick, face cord, half cord, woodpile or woodstack, but we certainly wish them every success.

*Joe Ross, from Roseburg, Oregon, is a retired program manager who has been a frequent contributor to Bluegrass Unlimited since the 1980s.*

## Brian Oberlin Update

Several years ago, Brian Oberlin returned to Grand Rapids, Michigan, his home state, where he's been busy with many projects, in addition to his involvement in Full Cord Bluegrass (see the article by Joe Ross).

After Brian was approached by a group of local mandolin players in Grand Rapids about starting a mandolin orchestra (similar to the popular group he'd organized in Oregon, now led by Christian McKee), Brian took on the project of starting a new mandolin orchestra.

During the pandemic, the 16-member Michigan Mandolin Orchestra, featuring mandolins, mandolas, octave mandolins, mandocellos, guitar and bass performed livestream concerts. In November, the orchestra will perform classical and contemporary pieces live.

This fall marks the return of Brian's Great Lakes Mandolin Camp, November 5th & 6th, in Skokie, Illinois. In spring 2022, Brian's River of the West Mandolin Camp returns to the Menucha Retreat Center in Corbett, Oregon, June 9-12. You can find information about these camps at [www.mandoberlin.com](http://www.mandoberlin.com).

Brian says he misses his friends in Oregon and looks forward to seeing folks in spring of next year.

The Oregon Bluegrass Express extends a hearty congratulations to Brian on his recent marriage to musician Sallie Bacon!







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# Grant Award Information and Application

Applications Due March 1  
Submit to: OBA  
P.O. Box 1115  
Portland, OR 97207  
Or:  
president@oregonbluegrass.org

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Time to Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Are you an OBA Board Member or Relative? \_\_\_\_\_

This is an application for:  
 Waller Award  
 Candey Award

*(Use a separate page to complete the following section, if necessary.)*

Describe your involvement in the Oregon Bluegrass Community.

Describe the Use of Grant Funds \_\_\_\_\_

For What Time Period Will Funds Be Used \_\_\_\_\_

How Will the Grant Funds Further Your Musical or Career Aspirations?

Provide information on who would receive Grant Funds from OBA, should you be awarded a Grant (name, address, phone number, email address)

For questions about this application, contact:  
president@oregonbluegrass.org

## Thank You and Good Luck!

# OBA Steve Waller Memorial Fund

## History

In honor of his significant contributions to music and the Oregon Bluegrass Association (OBA), the Steve Waller Memorial Fund (the Fund) was established after Steve's passing in June 2015. The purpose of the Fund is to honor Steve through awarding financial grants to deserving individuals, to further their education, professional growth, or the advancement, preservation or support of bluegrass music.

Resources supporting the Waller Fund include: OBA general account funds, donations from the Oregon bluegrass community, and, potentially, grants received from various other organizations. OBA's goal is to receive enough support to endow the Waller fund, so that the principal balance remains intact in perpetuity, and regular earnings support annual grant awards. Until that point is achieved, OBA will strive to maintain financial resources to award funds deemed sufficient for recipients.

OBA administers the Waller Fund. Grant awards may vary in amount, and may be awarded to one or more recipients. OBA's Waller Fund Committee will review applications and recommend award recipient(s) and amount(s) to the OBA Board of Directors for final approval. The OBA aims to present the award annually at the Annual Meeting in April.

## Scope

Steve Waller Memorial Fund grants will be awarded annually to individuals or groups with involvement in the Oregon Bluegrass community. The OBA Waller Fund Committee will consider all requests received through completion of the Waller Grant Application Form by the due date.

## Criteria

1. Applicant(s) must be an Oregon Bluegrass Association member (individual or band) and the primary award recipient must be an Oregon resident.
2. Applicants must have a stated financial need.
3. Applicants may request funds for musical tuition or lessons, professional development, or the advancement of the bluegrass genre.
4. Applicants must complete and submit the Waller Grant Application Form by the due date.
5. Applications may not be submitted by a current OBA Board Member or relative.
6. Grant award payments will be made by OBA to the entity designated on the Waller Grant Application Form.
7. OBA may revise the criteria and Waller Fund application process from time to time, as needed.



## Use Of Funds

1. Awards are intended to be used within the OBA's mission statement to "promote, encourage, foster, and cultivate the preservation, appreciation, understanding, enjoyment, support, and performance of bluegrass and other closely related music."
2. Awards are to be used within the one-year grant cycle and the Grant Use Summary Form to be completed by June of the year following the award.
3. Submit the form by March 1 to [president@oregonbluegrass.org](mailto:president@oregonbluegrass.org) or mail by mail to the OBA.
4. Recipients of the award may be asked to present their use of the award at the OBA general membership meeting held annually in April. If awardees are unable to present in person, a statement may be prepared.



# The Nora Candey Memorial Songwriting Fund

## History

In memory of Nora Candey, her husband Scott Candey has established The Nora Candey Songwriting Fund, to award a grant to songwriters who would like to further their craft.

Nora was very active in the bluegrass community until her passing in November, 2020. In addition to generously donating her time and talents, Nora was a talented multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, and gifted songwriter who deeply inspired us with her music.

In the words of Scott Candey, Nora “believed the songs are there, in some divine space, waiting. You don’t write them so much as discover them and give them form. There are a lucky few that notice, that snatch them when they are able...(from) that place where the songs come from.”

## Resources

Resources supporting the Nora Candey Songwriting Fund include: OBA general account funds, donations from the Oregon bluegrass community, and potentially grants received from other organizations. Our goal is the raise enough support to endow the Nora Candey Songwriting Fund so the principal balance remains intact in perpetuity and regular earnings support annual grants. Until that goal is achieved, the OBA will strive to maintain financial resources to award funds sufficient for recipients.

The Nora Candey Songwriting Fund and Grant will be administered by the Oregon Bluegrass Association (OBA). Nora’s dear friend and fellow songwriter, Joe Newberry, serves as an advisor to the grant committee.

The grant award may vary in amount, and may be awarded to one or more recipients. The grant committee will review applications and recommend award recipient(s) and amount(s) to the OBA Board of Directors for final approval. The OBA aims to present the award annually at the Annual Meeting in April.

## Scope

The Nora Candey Memorial Songwriting Fund will be awarded annually, or as funding allows, to individuals who are involved in the Oregon Bluegrass community. The OBA grant committee will consider all requests received through completion of the Grant Award Application Form by the March 1st due date of each year.

## Criteria

1. Applicants must be an Oregon Bluegrass Association member.
2. Applicants must have a stated financial need.



3. Applicants must complete and submit the grant award application form by the due date. Submit the form by March 1 to [president@oregonbluegrass.org](mailto:president@oregonbluegrass.org) or mail to the OBA.

4. Applications may not be submitted by a current OBA Board Member or relative.

5. Grant award payments will be made by OBA to the entity designated on the grant award application form.

6. OBA may revise the criteria and application process, as needed.

## Use of Funds

Recipients of the award may be asked to present their use of the award at the OBA annual meeting in April, in person or via a recording.

# Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival



*Clyde Clevenger, Hammerin' Henry Strid and Niki Clevenger*



*Kerry Callahan*



*Whiskey Deaf (Photo by Clyde Clevenger)*



*Dave Elliott & Steve Reischman*



*Ellie & Amy Hakanson*



*Chick's Kids performance  
(Photo by Clyde Clevenger)*



*The Portland Radio Ponies*



# Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival



*Sunny South*



*Nick Marcantonio, Tom Nechville,  
Linda Leavitt & John Montgomery*



*Newlyweds!*



*The view from the stage  
(Photo by Patrick Connell.)*



*Kian Dye & Jon Meek*



*Annie Staninec & John Kael  
(Photo by Clyde Clevenger)*



*Mike Stahlman & Fred Coates*



*OBA board members with new OBA member,  
Cara Zemanek, center.*



# Billy Strings Plays Sold-Out Show at Edgefield



*Photo by Linda Leavitt*



*Photo by Kerstan Ruffer*



*Photo by Kerstan Ruffer*

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# Remembering “Cookie Lady” Fern Anderson

By Marvin Anderson and Lynn Cochran

**F**ern Anderson passed away calmly and peacefully on July 29, 2021 after suffering a stroke followed by pneumonia. She had a wonderful ability of making friends everywhere and will be sorely missed.

Fern loved bluegrass music long, long before she began attending festivals throughout the Pacific Northwest with her partner Lynn. When asked what instrument she played, she always responded “cookie sheets.” Always ready and willing to help out, Fern’s natural generosity compelled her to wonder what she could bring and contribute to the many performances and festivals that she enjoyed attending. Since she didn’t play a bluegrass instrument, she decided to start bringing cookies for band members. As you can imagine, this went over very well and soon expanded into bringing cookies for everybody in the audience. The cookies were served on large trays that somehow worked their way through the crowd. Festivals that delighted in her cookies were those at Stevenson, Clatskanie, Myrtle Creek, Winston, and Long Beach. Soon she couldn’t go anywhere without hearing a voice ring out, “Hey, Cookie Lady, I sure enjoyed your cookies at the festival!”

When Wintergrass, the largest bluegrass festival in the Northwest, started in Tacoma, Fern and Lynn went the first year as audience members. The second year she volunteered as a “band host” – basically a “gofer” for the band – and was thrilled to be assigned to Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, long a favorite of hers. As a volunteer, she had access to the Hospitality Suite which existed to provide coffee and food to band members and staff. Here she found her true calling: She met the lady in charge, Jan Jones, and asked if she could bring some cookies the following year. The answer was of course yes, so the



next year Fern baked and brought about 1,000 cookies. Jan was a bit overwhelmed, but the cookies quickly disappeared, so the next year Fern made more. By 1998, she was bringing 3,817 cookies; in 1999, 3,402 cookies; in 2000, 3,308 cookies; in 2002, 2,309 cookies and in 2003, 2,009 cookies. (She kept track of her baking in a small notebook.) But that year she also brought crescent rolls – 516 to be exact – to go with the soup that the Hospitality Suite would provide. The crescent rolls were always baked last, just before the trip, so that they would be fresh. Fern wasn’t the only one baking cookies for the Hospitality Suite and in 2002, they actually had cookies left over at the end of the festival. Stephen Ruffo knew how to handle this, and loaded up a big tray of cookies that he took down to the lobby, giving them out as a goodwill gesture to departing guests.

Over the years, Fern baked and supplied over 48,000 cookies to Wintergrass, counting on Lynn to be her “schlepper”

(a phrase she often used) to load them in the car and then carry the boxes upstairs. So impressed were the organizers of Wintergrass that in 2018 they created the “Fern Anderson Cookie Lady Award” which is given annually for “exceptional creativity and leadership.” It was an honor she treasured.

When not baking for bluegrass festivals, Fern raised two children, worked as a senior loan officer for a savings and loan, was a member of the Oregon Escrow Council (which she helped establish), and worked for the City of Portland. For many years she was the principal organist at her church and was a lifelong member of the Trails Club of Oregon, the hiking club where she first perfected the art of baking and bringing cookies. Fern was first introduced to bluegrass music in 1990 by former OBA

President Jim Hancock (Great Northern Planes), and a great debt of gratitude is owed to him for bringing Fern, the Cookie Lady, into the fold.

We’ve included three of Fern’s cookie recipes from the January/February 2000 issue of *The Bluegrass Express* where Fern was featured in a “Volunteer Spotlight” article written by Krista Maerz.



# Remembering "Cookie Lady" Fern Anderson

## Recipes from the Cookie Lady

### Macaroons by Fern Anderson

This cookie is just about the most favorite at bluegrass festivals. Of all the cookies I make, it is also about the most expensive per cookie to manufacture, so be aware of that.

Line cookie sheets with foil; spray generously with Pam (oil spray). Assemble ingredients in the order given. The amount of vanilla needed will vary some with the dryness of the coconut. Drop by teaspoonfuls on oiled foil cookie sheets; no need to leave space between cookies – they don't expand.

Bake at 350 degrees F. for 15 minutes (or 12 minutes if chocolate mini-morsels are added). Let cookies cool completely (about ½ hour) before removing from pan. Makes about 3 dozen, depending on how big the "teaspoonfuls" are.

Bake at 350 degrees F. for 15 minutes (or 12 minutes if chocolate mini-morsels are added). Let cookies cool completely (about ½ hour) before removing from pan. Makes about 3 dozen, depending on how big the "teaspoonfuls" are.

#### What you'll need:

5 cups flaked coconut  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2/3 cup flour  
1 can (14 ounces) sweetened condensed milk (I always use Eagle Brand)  
2 teaspoons vanilla (I use Watkins white vanilla)  
1 cup chocolate mini-morsels (optional)



Chip Russell swoops in on the Cookie Lady at a Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival in Stevenson, Washington



## Recipes from the Cookie Lady

### Ginger Cookies by Fern Anderson

A number of years ago I was visiting with Kate MacKenzie at a show she was doing at what is now the McMenamin's St. Johns Theatre & Pub. We were talking about cookies and she said her very favorite was ginger cookies, so after that conversation, a fellow employee shared her ginger cookie recipe and it has worked well. So here it is:

Melt shortening (2 minutes on high in microwave), add sugar and molasses. Then add cinnamon, salt, baking soda and ginger, blending in well. Add eggs and flour. Refrigerate at least 6 hours, preferably overnight. Roll dough in walnut-size balls and then roll in sugar. Place on greased cookie sheet (I use Silpats baking sheets). Bake at 350 degrees F. for 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool for 3 minutes before removing to cooling rack. Makes at least 5 dozen.

Hint: For the sugar to roll the cookies in before baking, I use raw sugar from Maui, available at most Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, or similar stores, or even from Maui if you need an adventure!

#### What you'll need:

1 ½ cups shortening  
2 cups sugar  
½ cup molasses  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
1 teaspoon salt  
4 teaspoons baking soda  
2+ tablespoons ground ginger  
2 large eggs  
4 cups flour  
Sugar to roll cookies in



Fern feeding the masses at the Columbia Gorge Bluegrass Festival in Stevenson, Washington, 2008

## Recipes from the Cookie Lady

### Snickerdoodle Cookies by Fern Anderson

Snickerdoodles are one of the favorites at bluegrass festivals. If you don't like cinnamon (or are allergic to it), you can roll the cookies in Nestle's Quik or any dry chocolate mix.

Melt shortening in microwave. Add sugar, cream of tartar, baking soda, salt, and (optional) dry vanilla. Add eggs, one at a time. Then add flour, blending after each cupful. Add lemon extract (optional). After refrigerating the cookie dough 4 hours or overnight, make small balls (about the size of a big walnut), roll in mixture of cinnamon and sugar (or chocolate mix). Place 2 ½ inches apart on cookie sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees F. for 8 to 10 minutes. Let cool 3 to 5 minutes before removing to cooling rack.

#### What you'll need:

1 ½ cups shortening  
2 ¼ cups sugar  
3 large eggs  
4 cups flour  
1 tablespoon cream of tartar  
1 ½ teaspoons baking soda  
¾ teaspoon salt  
Optional:  
2+ tablespoons dry vanilla  
4 drops lemon extract  
Cinnamon-Sugar Mixture:  
¼ cup sugar  
1 ½ tablespoons cinnamon

# Industrial Strength Bluegrass

Book review by Clayton Knight

In case you've missed it, a golden age is happening in the world of bluegrass journalism. By my reckoning, it got rolling in 2013 with Murphy Hicks Henry's *Pretty Good for a Girl* and really took off in Tim Newby's 2015 chronicle *Bluegrass in Baltimore*. Writers such as Penny Parsons, Thomas Goldsmith, and the venerable Neil V. Rosenberg have continued to raise the bar, blending rigorous research with skillful writing to record details and nuances of the bluegrass story while some of the first- and second-generation artists—and followers—are still with us.

To the delight of those of us who are keen to learn how bluegrass became the cultural institution it is today, *Industrial Strength Bluegrass* is such a book.

Editors Fred Bartenstein and Curtis Ellison began the project of documenting southwest Ohio's bluegrass legacy with a lecture series at the Hamilton campus of Ohio's Miami University, located in the cluster of industrial cities that are situ-



Thus, bluegrass began the shift from a primarily rural music to one played and appreciated by a displaced, distinctly urban population. The chapters that follow consider each element that was critical to creating a lasting regional (and some might argue, national) musical legacy. In the interest of space, I'll stick to those I found most compelling.

Daniel Mullins (Walls of Time podcast) tells the story of broadcasting in the Miami Valley from the days of the Renfro Valley Barn Dance on WLW to the legacy of Paul "Moon" Mullins on WFPB in Middle-

town. Yes, and Frank "Hylo" Brown got his nickname at the WFPB Jamboree.

Likewise, Larry Nager (writer and co-producer, *Bill Monroe: Father of Bluegrass Music*) catalogs the taverns, honky tonks, and hillbilly neighborhoods where bluegrass thrived, from an on-stage perspective—Nager played bass in Red Allen's band—as well as off-stage, as a longtime observer of Cincinnati's music scene.

ated between Cincinnati and Dayton. The lectures brought primary sources—Joe Mullins interviewed Bobby Osborne—together with historians and history-makers (Phillip J. Obermiller, Larry Nager, Lily Isaacs, and Bartenstein himself, among others) to bring the historical and geographical context to life, as well as provide faithful portraits of the well- and lesser-known principal characters. Each lecture became a chapter of the book, which organizes the material sensibly—it opens with Phillip Obermiller's description of the Great Migration, upon which the rest of the chapters depend—and the finite scope of each chapter frames it well as a story-within-a-story.

The trickle of Appalachian economic migrants into the industrial North that began during the Depression developed into a rushing stream during the Second World War and became a flood in the post-war years. As the coal industry in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee fell into decline, thanks to the advent of oil for heating and transportation, the factories of Hamilton, Middletown, and Dayton were booming, and hundreds of thousands of workers relocated to the region in search of steady paychecks. They brought their music with them on the "trail of the baloney rinds."





# Industrial Strength Bluegrass

I read Mac McDivitt's chapter on the region's recording studios, record labels, and record stores with particular interest. On December 11, 1949, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs recorded Foggy Mountain Breakdown at Cincinnati's Herzog Studios. While this event may not be the Big Bang of bluegrass, it is unquestionably one of the most significant in terms of the music's longevity.

Throughout *Industrial Strength Bluegrass*, the personalities shine brightly. Some you probably know: the Osbornes, Bobby and Sonny; Red Allen; Frank Wakefield; "Hylo" Brown; Jimmy Martin; JD Crowe; Larry Sparks; Ron Thomasson; the Jimmie Skinner Record Shop; Syd Nathan and King Records.

But the book gives ample space to some others—Earl Taylor; Jim McCall; Noah Crase; Walter Hensley; Charlie Moore; Bill Napier—whose names sent me running to YouTube to get to know them a little better.

In his chapter on distinctive qualities of southwestern Ohio bluegrass, ethnomusicologist and banjoist Ben Krakauer writes, "Many have noted the machine-like qualities of bluegrass music, including its fast tempos, its bright metallic tones, the highly choreographed movements of five performers weaving around a single microphone, and the complexities of its interlocking parts."

Is it unreasonable to suggest that music played for people who are far from home, after working a long shift, emulated the intensity and stress of their lives?

And finally, the lecture series that became a book is the book that became an album.

In 2021, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings released *Industrial Strength Bluegrass: Southwestern Ohio's Musical Legacy*, produced by Joe Mullins, a collection of contemporary recordings of songs made popular by Southwestern Ohio artists, featuring an all-star roster of bluegrass artists, including Osborne and Mullins himself.

**List your concert, festival, workshop, jam or performance on the OBA Calendar and hear your event announced on The Music From the True Vine Show on KBOO FM.**

**<https://oregonbluegrass.org/calendar/>**



**Industrial Strength Bluegrass: Southwestern Ohio's Musical Legacy.** Edited by Fred Bartenstein and Curtis W. Ellison. 2021. Champaign: University of Illinois Press. 288 pages. ISBN: 978-0-252-08560-4 (soft cover).



**Industrial Strength Bluegrass: Southwestern Ohio's Musical Legacy.** Compact disk, 2021. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.





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# Finding bluegrass in the time of COVID-19

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Compiled by Nancy Christie

Oregon and Washington bluegrass fans have been finding ways to gather safely. All times are Pacific (U.S. west coast). Confirm before you go! You should expect venues to follow their state's COVID-19 guidelines at a minimum, and venues may request stricter rules at their option.

Events and jams are posted on the Oregon Bluegrass Association's web page, <https://oregonbluegrass.org/>, and on the regional Facebook page called *Northwest Bluegrass* where bluegrass information for Washington, Oregon, and sometimes Idaho can be found.

**Jam organizers:** Update your jam information by emailing to [expressnews@oregonbluegrass.org](mailto:expressnews@oregonbluegrass.org).

**Sundays, Portland, Oregon:** 2:00-5:00 p.m., Portland Bluegrass Sunday Jam, outdoors, weather permitting. Wilshire Park, NE 33rd and Skidmore, Portland, Oregon. Organizer is working with a venue for indoor jamming. Updates at Facebook group: *Portland Bluegrass Sunday Jam*. Murray Nunn, [munn7515@gmail.com](mailto:munn7515@gmail.com).

**Sundays (3<sup>rd</sup>), Roseburg, Oregon:** 1:00-4:30 p.m., Sutherlin Senior Center, 202 E. Central Ave., Sutherlin, OR 97479. All-levels bluegrass jam. Liz Crain, [lizcrain42@gmail.com](mailto:lizcrain42@gmail.com), 541-679-0553.

**Tuesdays, Portland, Oregon:** 7:00-10:00 p.m., Tomorrow's Verse Taproom, 4605 NE Fremont St. Ste. 103 Portland, OR 97213. Bluegrass jam hosted by Rich Landar. Details at Facebook group: *Tomorrow's Verse Bluegrass Jam*.

**Tuesdays, Vancouver, Washington:** 6:00 p.m., Intermediate-advanced acoustic bluegrass jam. Doomsday Brewing Safe House, 1919 Main St., Vancouver. Updates at Facebook group: *Vancouver Washington Area Bluegrass Jam*.

**Wednesdays, Beaverton, Oregon:** 6:00 p.m., Round Table Pizza, 10150 S.W Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy., Beaverton, Or 97005, bluegrass jam. Confirm with the organizer if you are not on the email list. Jane Gallagher, [janeromfo5@gmail.com](mailto:janeromfo5@gmail.com).

**Thursdays (2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>), Medford, Oregon** 7:00-9:00 p.m., Call for current location. John Nice (541) 601-0254, [nicetunz@gmail.com](mailto:nicetunz@gmail.com)

**Saturdays, Gresham, Oregon:** Next concert is November 13. Monthly concert series hosted by Dave Elliott at Multnomah Grange 71, 30639 SE Bluff Road, Gresham, Oregon 97080, phone 503-663-4101. Admission \$10. Jamming 6:00-7:00 p.m., followed by concert(s) until 9:30 p.m.



# Finding bluegrass in the time of COVID-19

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**Saturdays, Portland, Oregon:** Taborgrass, starting Oct. 9 at Waverly UCC, 3300 SE Woodward Street Portland, OR 97202. Song Class 12:30-1:45. Tune Class 2:00-3:15. Jam Class 3:30-4:45. Open Jam 12:30-4:45 \$10 for one class, \$5 for each additional class. \$5 suggested donation for the open jam. Pay by cash, PayPal, or Venmo. Vaccination proof and masks required. Details and updates at Facebook group: *Taborgrass*. Email: [taborgrass@gmail.com](mailto:taborgrass@gmail.com)

**Multiple nights, Portland, Oregon-based online** live performances through the Facebook page: *Muddy Rudder Down Home Music Hour*. Watch for Thursday night's 7:00 p.m. shows with Annie Staninec, John Kael, and friends playing bluegrass and old-time music. Sundays at noon you'll find Irish tunes from Dan and Fran; Friday nights there's Lauren Sheehan with Americana songs, and other performers to discover.

**All the time, all bluegrass:** OBA Radio: <https://live365.com/station/Oregon-Bluegrass-Radio-a62184>

**More Radio:** "What's Playing on the Radio" on page 4 of this newsletter.

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# OBA Supporting Performer Directory

OBA supporting memberships are \$50 per year. This includes a listing and link on the OBA website and a brief (approx 35 word) band listing in the supporting performer directory.

## **Ash Creek**

Ash Creek explores the frontiers between bluegrass, folk, and traditional country music. Gene Alger plays banjo; Larry Ullman plays bass; Tim Howell plays guitar; Clayton Knight plays mandolin and fiddle. We all share lead and harmony vocals.

**Booking@eclecticacoustica.com**  
<https://eclecticacoustica.squarespace.com/>  
**Facebook: @ashcreekbluegrass ash-creek-bluegrass**  
**Clayton 503-358-0658**

## **Corral Creek**

Corral Creek's commitment to showing the audience a good time has worked out O.K. for 13 years. We share tunes of Oregon, gospel, and bluegrass standards to city festivals, cultural centers, bluegrass festivals, house concerts, wineries and more.

**Pam Young**  
[pywaterfalls@yahoo.com](mailto:pywaterfalls@yahoo.com)  
[corralcreekbluegrass.com](http://corralcreekbluegrass.com)  
**For bookings please call 503-319-5672**

## **Steve Blanchard**

Steve Blanchard is well known as an acoustic flatpicker guitarist, singer and songwriter with a career spanning over four decades. His musical style includes bluegrass, cowboy/western, folk, and Americana. No matter what the style or venue, you're sure to feel Steve's love and passion for his music.

**www.SteveBlanchardMusic.com**  
**503-730-0005**  
**Steve@SteveBlanchardMusic.com**

## **Dogwood String Band**

Contemporary bluegrass-fueled Americana

**Woody Wood**  
[dogwoodstringband@gmail.com](mailto:dogwoodstringband@gmail.com)  
[dogwoodstringband.com](http://dogwoodstringband.com)

## **Fire & Stone**

Fire & Stone is a nontraditional bluegrass band playing a diverse blend of traditional and contemporary folk, blues, pop, and bluegrass. F&S delivers a powerful sound of lyrical storytelling, rich harmonies, and expressive instrumental solos

**Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fire-andstoneband/>**  
**Email: [victor.reuther@gmail.com](mailto:victor.reuther@gmail.com)**  
**Telephone: (707) 832-9262**

## **The Jamblers**

The Jamblers play a blend of bluegrass, folk, classic rock, alt-indie and more, and jumble 'em all into our stringband style. We feature tight, bold harmonies and tons o' fun! Some call it "Americana." We call it "Music," the kind everyone enjoys.

**www.jamblers.com**  
**www.facebook.com/jamblers**  
**Gene Greer, [info@jamblers.com](mailto:info@jamblers.com)**  
**503-702-1867**

## **Kathy Boyd & Phoenix Rising**

IMEA 2015 Bluegrass Group of the Year. Kathy Boyd & Phoenix Rising is all about the stories, and the stories of everyday America are what you get from these four personable entertainers. With over a dozen years of awards on the shelves, the quartet has longevity in the performance arena and an extended fanbase worldwide! This hard-working group of songwriters is guaranteed to deliver a high-energy family-friendly performance that is a delight for all ages.

**www.phoenixrisingband.org**  
**KBPR@gmail.com**  
**503-936-8480**

## **Julie & The WayVes**

Julie and The WayVes is a 5-piece progressive bluegrass band, based in Portland, Oregon. Centered around the songwriting of Julie Schmidt, a confluence of hard-driving bluegrass and masterful composition and arrangement sensibilities delivers a powerful and elegant sound. Timeless tones within a modern, artful structure that incorporates genre-bending subtleties without sacrificing what their instrumentation suggests they are: A bluegrass band. Members: Julie Schmidt, Patrick Connell, Jon Meek, Kaden Hurst, and Rob Wright.

**Patrick Connell**  
[patnellconnell@gmail.com](mailto:patnellconnell@gmail.com)

## **Lost Creek Bluegrass Band**

From Portland, Oregon, Lost Creek delivers a driving blend of bluegrass and old-time standards with terrific vocal harmonies and tasteful instrumentation. For years they've delighted audiences at festivals, pubs, parks, dances, markets, and weddings throughout Oregon and Washington

**www.lostcreekmusic.com**  
**lostcreekmusic@gmail.com**  
**971-678-2337**

## **Midshelf String Band**

Midshelf String Band is a 4-piece Portland-based band with roots in bluegrass, folk, Celtic, honky-tonk and other Americana. We're fairly new as a band, but we've all been playing for decades in other bands like Back Porch Revival and Pagan Jug Band. We really enjoy playing together and aim to bring fun and good times with us wherever we go. Check here for our schedule:

**www.midshelfstringband.com/**

## **Misty Mamas**

The Misty Mamas serve up home-style bluegrass filled with powerful harmonies, traditional and original songs as well as tasty instrumentals combining the American genres of bluegrass, old time, gospel, folk and country music. Katherine Nitsch (vocals, guitar), April Parker (vocals, mandolin, accordion), Eileen Rocci (vocals, upright bass), Tony Rocci (guitar, mandolin, vocals)

**mistymamas.com**  
**April Parker 503-780-9770**

## **Never Come Down**

Earnest songwriting, dedication to craft, and genuine care for the music. Joe Suskind: Lead Guitar/Vocals, Crystal Lariza: Rhythm Guitar/Vocals, Kaden Hurst: Mandolin, Brian Alley: Banjo, Ben Ticknor: Bass

**Booking: [nevercomedown.band@gmail.com](mailto:nevercomedown.band@gmail.com)**  
**Brian Alley 303-330-8414**

## **Pickled Okra**

Bluegrass, quirky originals, harmony-laden traditionals, and bluegrass-influenced covers. Todd Gray (mandolin & drums) and Paisley Gray (guitar & upright bass)

**Paisley Gray**  
[pickledokraband@gmail.com](mailto:pickledokraband@gmail.com)

## **Rose City Bluegrass Band**

Bluegrass, Country and Americana. Peter Schwimmer, Spud Siegel, Gretchen Amann & Charlie Williamson

**Charlie Williamson**  
[charliew3@nwlink.com](mailto:charliew3@nwlink.com)

# OBA Supporting Performer Directory

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## ***The Rogue Bluegrass Band***

The Rogue Bluegrass Band is: Paul Hirschmann, guitar, dobro and vocals; Ed Hersherberger, banjo and vocals; Deb Smith-Hirschmann, bass and vocals; and Don Tolan, mandolin and vocals. An entertaining four-piece acoustic bluegrass group, featuring harmony vocals and foot-stomping fiddle tunes.

### ***Rogue Bluegrass Band***

Contact Don at

[RogueBluegrassBand@yahoo.com](mailto:RogueBluegrassBand@yahoo.com)

## ***Rowdy Mountain***

A throwback to the heyday of bluegrass music, Rowdy Mountain brings the heat with the raw, down from the mountain sound that originally gave bluegrass its wheels back in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Featuring energetic and fresh classics alongside stirring and relevant originals that honor the time-tested tradition, Rowdy Mountain is the real deal. Listen for yourself at [rowdymountain.bandcamp.com](http://rowdymountain.bandcamp.com).

971-347-6050

[rowdymountain@gmail.com](mailto:rowdymountain@gmail.com)

## ***Scratchdog Stringband***

The Scratchdog Stringband is creating a name for themselves as the vanguard of a high-energy, innovative brand of bluegrass that satisfies old-school traditionalists of the genre while enchanting modern audiences with a style of music they didn't yet know they loved. Some of the hardest-working young musicians in the Pacific Northwest.

Steve Eggers

[eggers-stephen@gmail.com](mailto:eggers-stephen@gmail.com)

## ***Slipshod***

Matt Snook (dobro and banjo) and Steve Blanchard (guitar and mandolin) offer listeners a broad and diverse range of music, including originals, familiar melodies and dynamic instrumentals. Check out this dynamic duo on their website, Facebook and YouTube..

[www.SlipshodMusic.net](http://www.SlipshodMusic.net)

Steve Blanchard, 503-730-0005

[Steve@SteveBlanchardMusic.com](mailto:Steve@SteveBlanchardMusic.com)

Matt Snook, 541-805-5133

[BohemianBanjo@gmail.com](mailto:BohemianBanjo@gmail.com)

## ***Sunfish Duo***

With Sarah Ells on guitar and Daniel Fish on mandolin, you'll go back in time to hear traditional harmonies and simple melodies from the roots of Bluegrass, Country, and Old-time music.

Daniel Fish

[djoeifish@gmail.com](mailto:djoeifish@gmail.com)

## ***Timothy Jenkins Band***

Timothy Jenkins

[tjenkins@uoregon.edu](mailto:tjenkins@uoregon.edu)

## ***The Hardly Heard***

The Hardly Heard perform music inspired by Second Generation Bluegrass. We offer rich vocal harmonies, memorable instrumentals and we are equipped with a full gospel set for Festival Sundays.

Contact email: [thehardlyheard@gmail.com](mailto:thehardlyheard@gmail.com)

Visit us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/thehardlyheard/](http://www.facebook.com/thehardlyheard/)

[www.reverbnation.com/thehardlyheard](http://www.reverbnation.com/thehardlyheard)

Band Website: [www.reverbnation.com/thehardlyheard](http://www.reverbnation.com/thehardlyheard)

## ***True North***

True North is a powerhouse of award-winning original songs, with the crazy-good picking and harmonies of a band deeply rooted in folk and bluegrass genres. Members: Kristen Grainger, Dan Wetzel, Josh Adkins and Martin Stevens.

[truenorthband@comcast.net](mailto:truenorthband@comcast.net)

[www.truenorthband.com](http://www.truenorthband.com)

## ***Wailing Willows***

Traditional bluegrass. Andrew Spence, banjo, guitar, primary lead vocal. Hal Spence, guitar and tenor, Andrew's dad, bringing family-blend harmonies. Kim Jones, bass fiddle, lead and harmony vocals. Dave Elliott, mandolin and lead harmony vocals.

Contact: 909-913-3668

[andspence@gmail.com](mailto:andspence@gmail.com)

## ***Whistlin' Rufus***

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[www.whistlinrufus.com](http://www.whistlinrufus.com)

Pat Connell

[whistlinrufus@comcast.net](mailto:whistlinrufus@comcast.net)

971-207-5933



# Mike's Hoedown

Composed By Mike Eisler  
Transcribed By Annie Staninec

A G C

3 A E A E A

6 C A

8 G E

10 A G C

12 A E

*Many thanks to Annie Staninec for creating this arrangement of Mike's Hoedown for the Oregon Bluegrass Express, and to Mike Eisler for allowing us to publish his original tune!*

Before the age of 21, Annie Staninec had toured with David Grisman and the Gypsy Caravan, Darol Anger's Republic of Strings, and numerous other regional groups. Thereafter, she joined several national acts including Town Mountain and the Kathy Kallick band, and expanded her repertoire to include such diverse artists as Mary Gauthier and eventually Rod

Stewart. Annie's deep knowledge and experience extend into bluegrass, old-time, swing, Irish, Cajun, country and popular styles, and she has also taught at some of the most prestigious music camps in the world. Annie now makes her home in Portland, Oregon, and spends her time teaching, touring, and recording.

You can find Annie's recording of Mike's Eisler's "Mike's Hoedown," along with her fiddle instruction books at: <https://anniestaninec.com/store>



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local jams, festivals, concerts,  
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We are always seeking members for various tasks, ranging from open director positions to taking a shift at the merch booth at a festival. It's fun and you'll meet some truly nice people. Tell us a little about yourself in an email to [volunteers@oregonbluegrass.org](mailto:volunteers@oregonbluegrass.org) or contact any board member.

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