



IdaGrass

Volume 3 Issue 6

November – December 2007

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If you are looking for a great holiday album, check out, "A Skaggs Family Christmas", Vol 1. Skaggs Family Records.

Bluegrass Events Calendar

Southern Zone Monthly Jam - 7pm at Gerties' Brick Oven Cookery in Twin Falls.

Hot Jam, 1st Monday of the month

Slow Jam, 3rd Monday of the month

John Boyer, 208-733-4552 boyerj1@mindspring.com

Middle Zone Monthly Jam –

Bill Elmer 208-466-1349 mandobil@mail2Musician.com

Al Jackson at Bmbbluegrass@aol.com

Bob Greer at 208-466-1719

Northern Zone Monthly Jam, first SAT of the month at the Orchards United Methodist Church, 1213 Burrell Ave. Lewiston Orchards. Noon to 5pm.

Steve Gleason (208) 798-8280

Pete Northcutt (208) 983- 2277

Bluegrass in the Barn – Because of the cold weather and no source of heat in the Harshman Barn, Bluegrass in the Barn is temporarily on hold. We will have an update in the JAN issue of IdaGrass.

ISBA Website:

www.idahosawtoothbluegrass.org

The purpose of the Idaho Sawtooth Bluegrass Association:

- To preserve and perpetuate Bluegrass music as a heritage of our country;
- To promote the education and enjoyment of Bluegrass music;
- To promote fellowship among all musicians and supporters who have a love for Bluegrass music, regardless of race, creed, color, ethnicity, or ability to play music.

Message from the President

The summer festival season is over and now it is time to plan for a better next year.

After two years of holding the ISBA Festival in Payette it is apparent that there is little support to justify continuing at that venue.



We (The ISBA Board of Directors) are in the process of finding a venue that will attract festival patrons in greater numbers. We are currently looking at a location in Round Valley that would satisfy the difficulties we had with the Payette venue. We feel that it is a must to have Camping, Jamming, and Stage performance facilities all at one location. We are moving ahead on this as quickly as is possible in hopes to be ready for our 2008 ISBA Bluegrass Festival

I take this opportunity to thank everyone that helped make the Payette Festival run as smoothly as it did this year. It was nice to have enough volunteers to handle the pressing needs. Thank you, Sydney. Also I cannot say enough good about how all the bands did a superb job in putting on a great show. Hopefully the new location will bring better times at the box-office so the Bands can be properly compensated.

Keep Pickin', Bob Greer

Bluegrass Happenings

The MRBA (Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association) is trying a new idea. We are having a "Show and Jam" at the Florence IOOF hall on Sunday, November 11th... starting at 2 pm. We will have jammin' (and practicing) upstairs, and in the kitchen, and maybe the bathroom—that may be gender specific. We will have a sound system and chairs set up down stairs... (The idea is similar to the old fiddle jams we had years ago.)

Bluegrassers that want to play on stage just sign up at the show and when their turn comes, they gather whomever they want to back them up and do a couple songs on stage. If we get some folks to play on stage and some folks to come and listen—I think it will be a new kind of fun. Come join in the fun and bring your friends. ~Mike Conroy
Tariconroy@webtv.net

Neighboring Bluegrass Associations -

Arizona Bluegrass Association –
www.azbluegrass.org

California Bluegrass Association –
www.cbaontheweb.org

Idaho Bluegrass Association –
www.smithfowler.org/bluegrass/IdahoBGindex.htm

Inland Northwest Bluegrass Association –
www.mtbluegrass.com

Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association –
www.mtbluegrass.com

Oregon Bluegrass Association –
www.oregonbluegrass.org

Washington Bluegrass Association –
www.washingtonbluegrassassociation.org

My apologies to Bruce George and the leadership of the Idaho Bluegrass Association for not including them in this list in the last issue. It was purely an oversight, not a conscious decision. Helen Smith ☺

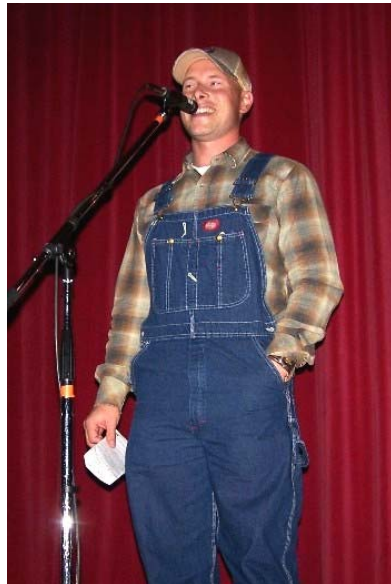
Thank You! Thanks! Thank You!

These photos represent some of the many people who helped make the Payette Fall Festival such a success.

Thank you for your time and effort.



BANDS - Council Mountain Bluegrass Band



MASTERS OF CEREMONY - Dennis Stokes



MEMBERSHIP - Melba Cooper



WORKSHOP INSTRUCTORS - Pat Massie



ADVERTISING - Jim McCue



**TICKET SALES - Rich Johnson & Jim Sturgill
(Photos courtesy of Jim McCue)**

Chatting with the Board

This month's chat is with Bill Elmer. Bill has recently agreed to serve as a Middle Zone Board Member. Welcome to the board.

IdaGrass: How long have you been playing bluegrass and tell us how you got started.

Bill: *I started playing bluegrass music in the summer of 1973. I'd already been listening to the Carter Family, Doc Boggs, Doc Watson, "Spyder" John Koerner, Joan Baez, Flatt and Scruggs and many other folk musicians by the late 60's. I don't believe that I knew Bluegrass had a different musical classification per se. I played finger style guitar at the time as well as rock and roll.*

In January of 1971 I took Margo Rae on our first date to the Freight and Salvage coffee shop where we stumbled onto Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys. Their performance totally mesmerized us. I remember waking up the next morning wondering if the music we'd heard was as other worldly as it had seemed during the show.

I can still feel and hear Curly Ray's Fiddle, Roy Lee Centers' vocals and Ralph's haunting harmonies as I played the album "Cry From The Cross."

By the spring of 1973 my wife Margo Rae and I had moved to Greenbrier Tennessee, a small town twenty-five miles north of Nashville. We lived on a small twenty-acre farm, where we had a garden as well as horses, chickens, and a Blue Tick Hound named "Blue." Many weekends we'd drive into Nashville to the "Old Time Picking Parlor." There we'd hear Buck White and the Down Home Folks. Vassar Clements and Norman Blake would sometimes jam during the set breaks. Seeing and hearing those great musicians play and sing put a fire in me to learn the mandolin. The White's special family harmony put Margo Rae and me on track soaking up their style of bluegrass harmony. My bother-in-law had an old "tatter bug" mandolin and I couldn't resist trying it out. I didn't know much about it but sure loved trying. Buck White's mandolin playing really influenced how I approached the mandolin for a long time. 1973 was my summer of Bluegrass enlightenment.



(Photo courtesy of Jim McCue)

IdaGrass: What instruments do you play and which did you learn first?

Bill: *My first instrument after the piano was the guitar. I was 11 years old in 1964 and the Beatles had dethroned The "King," Elvis. My Dad bought me a new Epiphone.*

Next was the mandolin. This was sort of by default. Even though I loved the mandolin I still felt I was a guitar player. However, there were too many guitar players around. I gave in and it's been number one ever since.

Banjo and fiddle come in, tied for third. I'm not sure which one came first. After playing guitar and mandolin for so long I don't have the patience for playing the fiddle. Occasionally I'll play the banjo in public, but in an old-time style.

IdaGrass: If you could own any mandolin in the world, what would it be?

Bill: *It would have to be a Lloyd Loar 5 F Gibson. Bill Monroe's F5 would just be too cool! But only in my dreams! I'd love to own a real nice, clean, all original Lloyd Loar. That would really be the best. Besides, they sure do increase in value.*

IdaGrass: What one person has been the biggest influence in your bluegrass development and in what way?

Bill: *That would have to be Bill Monroe. Obviously, he had the creative drive. He had the vision. He had great sense of time and space when playing the mandolin. Bill was a feel player, Bluesy.*

Bill's style kept changing over the years and he stayed creative right up until he died.

IdaGrass

When He wrote, so much of it was very personal. If you've heard Bill recite "I'm On My Way Back to the Old Home," it can bring tears to your eyes. You can just feel the loneliness; you can feel the hurt. To me, Bill really brought the blue notes and the high lonesome lyrics together. His mandolin playing is so powerful and expressive—very much in the moment, very much how he felt at the time. That's what drives where I'm trying to go now.

IdaGrass: Tell us about one of your goals as a musician.

Bill: *I hope that I can be more expressive in my singing, my phrasing, my feeling for a song. Not just notes and words but being able to tell the story with real feeling*

IdaGrass: What is your favorite bluegrass tune/song? Your least favorite? Why?

Bill: *I don't know really—maybe Rocky Top? This is my lame attempt at a joke!*

Actually, I think right now it would be, "He Walked All the Way Home." It's a song by Blue Highway from a few years ago. It's a new Civil War ballad that translates well to any war that's ever been fought—a song about people.

Least favorite? Rocky Top? Maybe Dueling Banjos? Another lame joke. There are so many that have been over-played over the years that were once actually good songs. I just remembered one I really don't like! Amelia Earhart.

IdaGrass: What advice would you give people new to jamming about learning to play with others?

Bill: *First make sure you're in tune! Make sure that you work on timing. Do your best to listen to what's being played. Don't play too loud. How fast is the tempo? Can I keep up? Is this an open or closed jam? Ask questions. People are always happy to help.*

IdaGrass: You currently play mandolin with Tradition, have you had other opportunities to play with bluegrass bands?

Bill: *I've been playing with Tradition for a year now. It's been great fun and a learning experience. My mandolin playing has really evolved since playing with these great pickers.*

I've played for many years in different bands with my wife Margo Rae. Bands from Nebraska to Maryland, and Pennsylvania to Idaho. My son Erik has been involved since he was fifteen. I think

my first band was called the Smoggy Mountain Boys. Not too serious. Margo and Erik and I are the core of the Midnight Flyer Band. With the way it works now, with family and friends maybe it should be called, Midnight Flyer—Family and Friends.

IdaGrass: You accepted to serve as an ISBA board member; what specific challenges do you think the ISBA has in helping to promote bluegrass in Idaho?

Bill: *I think figuring out how to make bluegrass music accessible and enjoyable to as many different types people as possible. To put a positive face on this great music, to take it from a sort of cloistered group to one that can show the general public bluegrass music doesn't mean we're some kind of backward-thinking individuals. Show that the ISBA isn't the poster child for the movie "Deliverance."*

IdaGrass: Tell us about one of the best bluegrass events/experiences you have had.

Bill: *We were living in Maryland in about 1985. There was a winter indoor festival in Baltimore. I was trying to learn a Mike Compton song called, Monroebillia, from a Nashville Bluegrass Band album. Mike and the band were there. I saw Mike and struck up a conversation and asked him about the song. He volunteered to show me how to play the tune back stage. Everything was going great until the back door opened and Bill Monroe walked in. Boy did Mike get nervous! He said "I got to show this Monroebillia song to Bill." That was it! I have to laugh now because I was feeling the same way with him moments earlier.*

" Future Budding Bluegrass'er"



Carma Phillip is seen here with two young bluegrass enthusiasts.

(Photo courtesy of Jim McCue)

Interview with Rhonda Vincent

When I attended the California Bluegrass Association Father's Day Festival in Grass Valley, Gail Williams arranged the opportunity for me to sit down with Rhonda Vincent and ask her a few questions. She was delightful and gracious, and here's what she said...

IdaGrass: Rhonda, you come across as just a down-home country girl. This career, especially, has pitfalls that could sidetrack you from that; tell me how do you stay grounded?

Rhonda: *First of all, my family, and traveling with your family keeps you grounded. This is what I have always done, so it's a real natural thing for me. It's part of life, so it's not something new that I go, "Oh my goodness." I think because it's something I've done since I was 3 years old, I'm very comfortable with it.*

My husband is a real guy that will keep you humble and he really helps me keep that perspective. When I was first married, my husband would always leave the wood box empty, purposely, so that every time I came home, that would be the first thing I would need to do.

I think living in northern Missouri, not living in Nashville and that atmosphere, lets you get away from your career and really go home and kind of rejuvenate. I could really get a perspective of: okay, there's this, this is my family, and then there's a career. And I think it really makes you appreciate both worlds.

IdaGrass: You are a woman of action; I very much admire that. In an industry that's predominately been male, tell me about that challenge.

Rhonda: *First thing, I didn't realize that there was this barrier. My dad kind of instilled in me that there isn't anything that you can't do. That's the first step – that determination. My father had a car wreck when I was 2 years old and was paralyzed from the neck down. He wasn't expected to live, let alone walk. He was finally able to walk with a cane and so he's a very determined person. I think he instilled in us that there's nothing that you can't do. He's the one that made us driven.*

Here's the determination in my life. I got married and was working with my family. People instantly thought I would quit playing. I was pregnant with my first child and people think, oh, well, you're going to stop playing. I'm not going to stop. I was on the road four days before my daughter was due. My mom's an EMT and she was hoping she would get to deliver the baby on the road. It's the same way with my second daughter, Tensel. There's always that determination that comes from my father.

In bluegrass music, I can't say that I really ran into a space where I felt that because I was a woman that I couldn't do something, but I think there seems to be a thing that, as a woman, you have to work harder. It's just like, if I'm going to go play basketball with the boys, I've got to play that much harder in order to play basketball with those boys. I think a lot of women just expect that it should be handed to them. It's not that way.

The playing has never been that easy for me. For my bother, Darrin, it just came naturally to him. Not me. I had to sit and work the breaks with records, listening to the songs and learn note by note.

IdaGrass: As I watch you on stage, I can see you have this great connection with the people with whom you play. Tell me something that you most admire about that person, or a strength they bring to Rhonda Vincent and the Rage.

Rhonda: *Kenny Ingram was the first man that I hired. It took me six months to get his phone number. I called him and I said, "Hi, I'm Rhonda Vincent. I love your playing and I would love to have you in my band." And he said, "I'm not interested," and hung up. It took me another six months because I called him again a few weeks later and he'd changed his number. It took me another six months to get his number again. I found out where he hangs out and I started leaving messages for him there.*

Kenny's strength is that he's a hard driving banjo player and he's the best at the really straight ahead,



Rhonda Vincent at Grass Valley, June 2007
(Photo courtesy of Will Williams)

IdaGrass

Earl Scruggs style banjo playing. He's a great guy. He's a guy that enjoys the passion for the travel and that's very important. You have to enjoy the travel and you have to love the music.

Kenny brings many, many years of experience. When some of the younger guys don't understand what's going on, Kenny will take them aside and say, "Look, I've been down this road before and you can make it through this." Or, "This is pretty typical for this situation." He brings a wealth of experience because he traveled with Jimmy Martin and learned from the very best, Lester Flatt, Jimmy Martin. So that's Kenny's strength; number one; he's really strong on the banjo, but he's also a great person. When he first joined the group I was asked, "How does Kenny get along with those younger guys?" He gets along with them great. It's a really good combination. This is Kenny's sixth year.

Mickey Harris joined about the same time. Mickey is one of the most solid bass players that there is musically. Mickey is not only a great bass player and singer, but he's a handy guy. He has put the bus together on more than one occasion. Once we lost a pulley in the middle of Montana. Ted's Repair drove by- thank goodness, and took Mickey to town to get the necessary things. Luckily the pulley had not blown out the motor and knocked everything to pieces, but with a few wires and things, and the pulley, he was able to rig it together. He's gotten the bus going on many occasions when we would have been sitting there otherwise. He's the first guy, if something needs to be done, he's there. If the floor needs to be swept, you'll see Mickey with a broom, and he'll be sweeping up the floor. He's a guy that's really handy and he's willing to do it. Some people can do that, but Mickey is willing to do that and you don't have to ask him to do it. Before you can think about, hey Mickey, he's already got it done. So that's one of Mickey's strength. We have Hunter Berry next. This is also Hunter's sixth year. Hunter, he plays a very unique style of fiddle that I didn't hear in any other player at the time when I was looking. He plays a Benny Martin style. He has that grit, that raw grit that is what I was wanting to project. When picking musicians, you have to all be on the same page; finding people who can project the type of music that you want to project. Hunter instantly fit that bill. He was a perfect mix musically because he could play the fiddle. He's also one that can pick up the guitar, the mandolin, he can play anything. He's probably the one, if everybody's feeling down, he's always the one to put a smile on everybody's face. You can look at his face and laugh because he just always has a happy look on his face. He's always jolly. He'll wake up with some funny remark and he's liable to

come in and start singing to you the first thing in the morning, and he wants people to know that he sings higher than I do. He has an ear and he can sing any part.

Disc Space by Mike McCarthy

ISBA Member, Mike McCarthy lives in Twin Falls and thinks, "You can never have too much banjo." Mike has agreed to share and review newly released, and other CDs, with our readers.

"Navy Blue Bluegrass" U.S. Navy Country Current

Their live shows are legendary, but I wasn't disappointed in the how they sound in the studio. Instrumentally, they are superb - Wayne Taylor on guitar, Keith Arneson on banjo and Patrick White on mandolin and fiddle. The harmonies



and arrangements are excellent as well. This is traditional, straight ahead bluegrass. Most of the songs are interesting, lesser known covers, such as, A Walk in the Irish Rain (from the group California), and Tom Paxton's, Last Thing on My Mind. There are some overworked war horses I could have done without (The Old Home Place, Whitewashed Chimney, The Prisoners Song). There are two great banjo tunes, both Keith Arneson originals, Douglas the Dog (in open D) and the technically, and wildly fast, Sugarland Run. I really liked the slower banjo playing on, A Good Woman's Love. There are two nice Wayne Taylor originals (Heart of Caroline, and Every Time It Snows). If you like flawlessly played traditional bluegrass you won't be disappointed. **"Harvest Home - Music For All Seasons"** Jay Ungar and Molly Mason. This is not a bluegrass CD. In fact it's not even an old time CD. This is the kind of music you listen to while you stuff the turkey on Thanksgiving morning (after Bill Monroe or Jim and Jesse). It's mostly traditional American, with small touches of Celtic and classical music. Note, I didn't mention bluegrass, so if that's all you like, then, don't get this. If you want something that bridges the gap without getting too classical, and stays within the old time/contra dance style pocket, this is a very nice CD.



Members of the Jeffries Band & friend



Thank You, Mac, who found a warm place for us to jam on SAT night.



Late Night Jamming



Gospel Show - Al Jackson, Ken Kilgore and JD Webb



Band members from High Desert



Friends, Musicians and Young Ones
(Photos courtesy of Jim McCue)

Application for ISBA Membership

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email Address _____

IdaGrass, the ISBA newsletter is offered either in email or printed letter format. Using email saves the Association the cost of postage and printing. HOWEVER, because we want you to enjoy and look forward to the newsletter, we want you to receive the newsletter in a format with which you are comfortable.

I would like to receive the newsletter Email US Postal Service

New Member Renewal

Date _____

Yearly membership: \$10/individual \$15/family

Please mail to: **Idaho Sawtooth Bluegrass Association**
PO Box 123 White Bird ID 83554

If you have *Ideas, Comments, QUESTIONS, or Concerns*

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