



IdaGrass

Volume 12 Issue 4

July-August 2016

UPCOMING BLUEGRASS EVENTS

DARRINGTON BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

July 15-17

Darrington, WA

www.darringtonbluegrass.com

HARDTIMES BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

July 22-24

Hamilton, MT

www.hardtimesbluegrass.com

COUNCIL MOUNTAIN MUSIC FESTIVAL

August 19-21

Council, ID

www.councilfestival.com

BANNOCK COUNTY BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

August 26-28

Pocatello, ID

www.bannockcountybluegrassfestival.com

ISBA FALL FESTIVAL

September 16-18

Weiser, ID

www.idahosawtoothbluegrass.org

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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.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Summer isn't just flying by this year---it's moving at warp speed. Seems as though the Spring Jam and Fiddle Week were just yesterday. How can it be mid-July, already?

But don't despair; there's still lots of good music to play and to hear. As the nights warm up, fingers can keep on picking later and later, and more new tunes keep cropping up around the circle. With new tires on the motorhome and a full tank of fuel, who knows where you might end up?

Our new President has a mission to bring young people into bluegrass—something that the ISBA has always supported. This is a great time to gather your family (meaning everyone you care about!) and get them involved in music and supporting organizations that promote it.

Now—let's go play some music!

PT Limehouse
Co-Editor, IdaGrass

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Hello ISBA members:

As a lot of you know, I accepted the position of President of the association at the Kamiah Spring Super Jam this year. Kamiah was another success this year even though its date conflicted with Banjo Camp that was held the same week-end at Weiser. We missed a lot of good friends that were at Weiser, but the attendance at the Super Jam was close to a record breaker again this year. I hope everyone is able to get out and enjoy a lot of the music that is happening throughout the

summer this year, and I am looking forward to the get together at Weiser this coming fall. Memberships in the ISBA are starting to dwindle down, and it is a goal of mine to try to reverse that trend. I think that the best way to encourage more membership is to make sure that there are activities to create interest in the association such as jams. Another avenue to create interest is to encourage the youth and give them opportunities to be involved, ie; youth jams or contests, and the most important of all the opportunity to learn the music. When you get the kids involved it usually always gets the parents and the rest of the family involved as well.

Its easy to talk about doing these activities, but it takes Volunteers and a lot of work to make these events come to fruition. To those that are, or have been a volunteer for our past activities, I salute you and encourage you to continue your hard work not only for the Association but also for the prosperity of Bluegrass Music. If you have any extra time on your hands please help out, you might find it very rewarding. We have lost so many of our legends this last decade, from Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, and just recently Ralph Stanley. With these loses in bluegrass it is up to us to perpetuate the music into the future. My Best Regards to all,
Randy Berg

AND ONE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Hello ISBA members!

Summer has arrived at full strength again. Now I'm missing that cool rainy weather we had at Kamiah. If you didn't make it to Kamiah this year, you missed a really fun weekend. Even with all the rain, those who I talked with said they were having a great time. We were entertained by solid

performances from four regional bands, Higher Ground, Montana Ramblers, Flatgrass and Last Ride. Ozark Mountain Music, our headliner band delivered their usual, very enjoyable and entertaining brand of bluegrass music. We were also fortunate to see the debut performance of Hickory Bluff, an ISBA member band. These guys, (and 1 gal), do Bluegrass the way it's supposed to be done.

Now, on to Weiser. The Fall Festival at Weiser will be held Sept. 16, 17 & 18 this year. The festival committee (read board members) are working to finalize preparations for that weekend.

We have three good bands lined up for the concert in Hooker Hall. New South Fork from Idaho Falls (and Twin Falls), Ladd Canyon Ramblers from Eastern Oregon, and Hickory Bluff from the Boise area are sure to fill your need to hear some good, hard driving bluegrass. Some accomplished musicians have volunteered to host workshops on banjo, bass, guitar and mandolin. We need someone to do fiddle. Any volunteers?

Our webmaster, Carolyn Johnson has designed and re-configured the ISBA website to make it more user friendly and easier to maintain. Having this website is a very important asset for the ISBA. We all owe Carolyn a big "thank you" for building and maintaining the site. Please take a few minutes to check it out. Just go online and search idahosawtoothbluegrass.org I like it, and think you will too.

See you next time,
Stan

ONGOING BLUEGRASS JAMS— IDAHO BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION

Beginners' Jam every Thursday

A beginner bluegrass jam is held on Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9pm in the Pioneer Building (106 N 6th St), right next to Wise Guys Pizza (Main and 6th)

Intermediate Jam every Wednesday

from 6:30 to 9pm in the Pioneer Building

Open Jam at Boise/Meridian KOA RV Park

Meridian, Idaho
Every Tuesday 7 – 9:30 pm

ONGOING ISBA SPONSORED BLUEGRASS JAMS

Middle Zone Jam:

The Middle Zone Jam, held on Thursdays at Stan and Trudee Stickland's home, is on hiatus until September 1, 2016.

Northern Zone Jams:

On the third Sunday of the month at the Lenore Store on Highway 12, from 1-4 PM.

The Saturday jam at Jack in the Box is on hiatus until further notice.

Southern Zone Jam:

On the 1st and 3rd Monday of the month, 7-9 PM, downstairs at Gertie's Pizza in Twin Falls. Call for details: John Boyer at 208-733-4552

FIDDLE TUNE KEYS

Most fiddle tunes have only one key that they are traditionally played in. However, at the many bluegrass and old-time jams I have participated in over the past 25 years, I have found that often it happens that someone will call a fiddle tune in a key other than its traditional key. I have heard many bluegrass banjo and guitar players call 'A tunes' like 'Old Joe Clark' and 'Red Haired Boy' in the key of G, and I have met many old time fiddlers who either have no answer to give when asked what key the tune in is that they just called, or will call a tune in one key (usually a key other than its traditional key) and then proceed to play it in another key (almost always its traditional key). In particular, I have learned from experience to always get my banjo ready for playing in the key of D whenever a fiddler calls 'Angeline The Baker' in the key of A.

Why are some banjo and guitar players prone to calling 'A' tunes in 'G'? Most bluegrass banjo and guitar players who learn to play breaks for key of A fiddle tunes learn to play these in G, which then requires them to capo their instrument to the 2nd fret in order to play them in A. Furthermore, many banjo and guitar players learn their breaks for fiddle tunes from tabs they find on the internet or in books, and quite frequently there is no accompanying note to the tabs written in G for the A tunes that would indicate that they are A tunes (e.g., 'capo 2').

Fiddlers who either have no idea what key they are playing their tunes in, or who are mistaken about which key they are playing in usually also don't know what the chord progressions are for the tunes. Fiddlers who have not learned to play backup for fiddle tunes – which is true of many old-time fiddlers – often see little need to think in terms of

chords when they are playing the tunes, for it is rare for a fiddler to have occasion to play more than two strings at once. In some styles of old-time fiddling, even 'double stops' (playing two strings simultaneously) are used infrequently. So, being unaware of which chord the tune resolves itself to (i.e., the '1' chord of the tune, the chord that shares the same letter name as the key that the tune is in), many old-time fiddlers will either be at a loss to tell you what key they are playing in, or will name the wrong key.

The following is a list of 'G', 'A', 'C', and 'D' tunes that I have found to be among the most frequently called traditional fiddle tunes at the bluegrass jams that I have been involved in over the years. If you play any of these tunes but are not aware of what key they are traditionally played in, I suggest writing out the title of the tune with the name of the key after the title until you get to the point where you start thinking of the name of the key almost as though it were part of the title of the tune, e.g., Sally Johnson – G. Salt Creek – A. Also, if you are a banjo or guitar player who is prone to forgetting which are the G tunes and which are the A tunes, make it a point to always practice the G tunes in G (no capo), and the A tunes that you learned to play in G in A (capo 2).

G Tunes:

Big Sciota; Blackberry Blossom; Leather Britches; Red Wing; Temperance Reel.

A Tunes:

Big Sandy River; Bill Cheatham; Cripple Creek; June Apple; Old Joe Clark; Red Haired Boy; Sally Goodin; Salt Creek.

C Tunes:

Back Up And Push; Billy In The Lowground.

D Tunes:

Angeline The Baker; Arkansas Traveler; Forked Deer; Liberty; Lost Indian; Over The Waterfall; Soldier's Joy; St. Anne's Reel; Whiskey Before Breakfast.

If one calls a fiddle tune at a jam in a key that it is not traditionally played in, one should have a very good reason for doing so. Perhaps you are playing in an advanced jam in which your fellow jammers enjoy the challenge of playing fiddle tunes in non-traditional keys: with the right group of people, it can feel good to play 'Turkey In The Straw' in Bb or 'Old Joe Clark' in B; or maybe you are playing in a jam that consists only of banjo and guitar players and someone has misplaced their capo and there are not enough capos to go around for everyone to comfortably play 'Big Sandy River' in A. In both of these situations it would not be inappropriate to call a fiddle tune in a key other than its traditional key. In the latter scenario, it would even be the more jam-friendly option, provided, of course, that 'G' is the key you have in mind for 'Big Sandy River'.

Likewise, it could be a jam-friendly thing to do to call tunes like 'Boil The Cabbage Down' and 'Cripple Creek' in G rather than in the traditional key of A if you are at a jam at which a beginner banjo player shows up for the first time and it is obvious that he doesn't have a capo or a means of raising the pitch of his 5th string other than by turning the tuning peg, provided that you are fairly confident that everyone else at the jam would do okay with playing these tunes in G, and provided that, at the first appropriate moment, you fully intend to point the new jammer in the right direction for doing what he needs to do in order to be able to conveniently play 'A tunes' in A. Otherwise, you aren't doing him a favor by calling the tunes in a non-traditional key, for by doing so, you would be reinforcing an

unfortunate, and jam-unfriendly, tendency that many banjo and guitar players have.

Happy Pickin',

Jason Homey

banjomaster1@yahoo.com

RALPH STANLEY'S INIMITABLE VOICE

David Cantwell

The New Yorker Magazine

June 26, 2016

The bluegrass musician Ralph Stanley, who died on June 23 at the age of eighty-nine, leaves behind an enormously influential—and just plain enormous—body of work. As one half of the Stanley Brothers, a band on the short list of bluegrass originators, he recorded more than three hundred songs over two decades, ending in 1966. In the fifty years after that, working as a solo act in a style he was careful to identify not as bluegrass but as the old-time music that folks today call bluegrass, he recorded about a thousand more songs, spread across some seventy-five albums. That's all good news.

The bad news is that, when it comes to Ralph Stanley's voice, there has only ever been the one, and there will be no replacements. Stanley's voice has been called "a force of nature," "otherworldly," "elemental," "eerie." Try to describe it and you inevitably tumble into a deep mountain mine of contradictory clichés. Trying to capture its singular tone in a fresh way risks foolishness. ("Like a woodwind crossed with a coonhound, turned up to eleven" is a note I just jotted down, before scratching it out.)

His voice sounded so vital and powerful, and yet at the same time so frail and so very, very

old. Stanley recalled more than once that, as a child, he was known in his Primitive Baptist Church community as “the boy with the hundred-year-old voice.” There is a danger, though, in focusing on the strangeness of Stanley’s voice. As with his rendition of “[O Death](#),” the folk song he sang a cappella for the Coen brothers’ 2000 film “O Brother, Where Art Thou?,” the supposed weirdness of a Stanley vocal performance is easily mistaken for the essence of his art. That something as universal as a man praying for safe passage to another year was deemed exotic and haunting by contemporary audiences, rather than as ordinary and human, says more about us, I think, than it does about Ralph Stanley.

Stanley was born in 1927 in the Clinch Mountains of Dickenson County, Virginia. In his as-told-to autobiography, “Man of Constant Sorrow,” named for the song he continued to consider his signature number even after “O Death” earned him a Grammy, Stanley presents himself as “a backwards kid who could scarcely hand over a howdy,” who was asthmatic and worried about everything—especially the prospect of a life spent working in the coal mines that dominated the region. He learned to sing at church, and his mother taught him how to play the banjo, clawhammer-style. Music provided Stanley an alternative to working at a sawmill, like his father, or in the mines, as his stepbrothers did. For Ralph and his brother Carter, a year and a half older and gregarious and jocular where Ralph was anxious and tight-lipped, music wasn’t a path out of the hills; it was a safer and less soul-robbing way of staying put in the place they loved. In honor of that place, Ralph and Carter named their band the Clinch Mountain Boys.

They began their career in 1946, not long after Ralph returned home from serving in

occupied Germany. One of Carter’s early songs, “[The Little Glass of Wine](#),” popular on the radio program “Farm and Fun Time,” helped the brothers get signed to the tiny Rich-R-Tone label, in 1947. “Glass of Wine” was a poisoned murder ballad performed, like their handful of other early tracks, in the old-time string-band style. The following year they recorded “[Molly and Tenbrooks](#),” a Bill Monroe composition that the brothers played, note for note, in the new Bill Monroe style, which, in a few years, people would start calling bluegrass. Ralph plucked his banjo not in the two-finger style he’d grown up with but in the thrilling three-finger fashion of Monroe’s star sideman, Earl Scruggs; the Clinch Mountain Boys’ Pee Wee Lambert sang lead in precise mimicry of Monroe’s piercing falsetto; and the rhythm swung hard and scooted with driving bluegrass propulsion.

Bluegrass is modern music: rhythm-centric, improvisational, scarcely older than rock and roll. It wasn’t invented until Monroe added the banjoist Scruggs and the guitarist and lead singer Lester Flatt to his band, in the late nineteen-forties. Monroe was not pleased with the Stanleys’ mimicry. When his own label, Columbia Records, signed the Stanley Brothers, in 1950, Monroe promptly left for Decca Records in a huff. But, in a real sense, the Stanleys are the reason that Monroe is remembered today as the father of bluegrass music. Monroe, with key assists from Flatt and Scruggs, invented an exciting sound. As the first to adopt that sound, Ralph and Carter Stanley helped to invent a genre.

Ralph and Carter Stanley began as copycats, but they rapidly became masters of the new sound. Carter Stanley’s songs of earthly separation, such as “[The White Dove](#)” and “[The Fields Have Turned Brown](#),” and randy romancers, such as “[How Mountain Girls Can](#)

[Love](#),” were the equals of Monroe’s most sublime work. But it was Ralph Stanley, singing harmony with his brother or taking a lead, who truly set them apart. Ralph’s phrasing and attack on a lyric, chipping a line off short or stretching and worrying it to death and back, marked him as a Monroe disciple. The unmistakable tone and texture of Ralph’s high tenor—high and devastatingly lonesome, layered with all manner of meaning—were his alone.

To my ears, the finest music the Stanleys ever recorded was the work they cut between 1958 and 1966, for the Starday and King labels. Improved recording technology makes these sides pop more like a live performance, especially Ralph’s banjo and voice. The addition of hot acoustic-guitar picking was a Stanley innovation that is now the bluegrass standard. The period also included the brothers’ only real radio hit, an of hot acoustic-guitar picking was a Stanley innovation that is now the bluegrass standard. The period also included the brothers’ only real radio hit, an updating of “The Arkansas Traveler” called “[How Far to Little Rock](#),” which incorporated the vaudevillian humor that was a part of their live sets. Ralph: “Hello, stranger . . . why don’t you cover your house?” Carter: “Well, when it’s raining I can’t, buddy. And when the sun’s a-shinin’ it don’t leak!”

It’s in these years that all those clichés—“force of nature,” “otherworldly”—really attached themselves to Stanley’s voice. On “[Rank Stranger](#),” the Albert Brumley-penned gospel standard that is among the Stanley’s most beloved performances, that voice blasts like a siren of alienated misery and end-times devastation. He sings but a single line by himself—“Everybody I met seemed to be a rank stranger”—but that utterance, just twice

repeated, so dominates the record that it’s easy to forget that “Rank Stranger” is formally a Carter lead, with trio chorus.

Carter Stanley died fifty years ago this December, at forty-one, victim to liver disease and alcohol abuse. Bill Monroe, his feud with the brothers long since laid to rest, performed “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” a cappella, at Carter’s funeral. The inscription that Ralph Stanley chose for his brother’s tombstone read, “Farewell, Carter, for a Little While.”

This past half century, a frequent encore of Ralph Stanley’s live appearances was “[The Hills of Home](#),” a recitation in which Ralph pledged continued devotion to his brother, to their music and their audience. Ralph had quickly determined to carry on after Carter’s death, retaining the band, the name, and the sound of the Clinch Mountain Boys. But he also made key changes, which have proved profoundly influential in their own right. He began to add more old-time ballads to his sets and his albums. He continued to emphasize gospel material as well, but he began performing it more often in the a-cappella fashion of the Primitive Baptist Church.

The backwards boy who couldn’t hand over so much as a howdy became a confident front man and a bandleader’s bandleader. The Clinch Mountain Boys launched Ricky Skaggs and Keith Whitley to country stardom and made bluegrass legends of post-Carter lead singers Larry Sparks and Charlie Sizemore. The recording debut of another recently deceased bluegrass singer, James King, was on a 1986 album called “Stanley Brothers Classics with Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys and Introducing James King.” That’s a mouthful, but it’s also a pretty concise statement of what Stanley saw as his mission all through his solo years: to continue the

pioneering bluegrass sound of the Stanley Brothers, to preserve a related but distinct old-time legacy for himself, and to keep an ear out for talent to carry on the work when he was gone.

He kept on recording, and was particularly prized for star-studded duet albums, such as "Saturday Night, Sunday Morning," in 1993; "Clinch Mountain Country," five years later; and "Clinch Mountain Sweethearts"—with Iris DeMent, Lucinda Williams, and Dolly Parton, among others—six years after that. He kept up a furious touring schedule, some two hundred dates a year well into his eighties. New fans, who first encountered him via "O Death" or on the subsequent "Down from the Mountain" tour, could be surprised to discover, at a county fair or classic-bluegrass festival—like the one held each June in Bean Blossom, Indiana—that Stanley was not moralistic or humorless. The Stanley standard "Mountain Dew," a regular of Clinch Mountain Boys set lists, did not proselytize for sobriety or warn of the dangers of drink. "Love Me Darling Just Tonight" was not about hand-holding. Onstage, Dr. Ralph, as he called himself after being awarded an honorary degree from Tennessee's Lincoln Memorial University, could be chatty and corny and even a little blue: "Giving applause to a bluegrass musician is like making love to an old maid," he liked to tell audiences. "You just can't hardly overdo it."

His voice began to weaken as he aged, but somehow this only seemed to treble its power. "I mourn out my songs more than I did as a young man," he explained in "Man of Constant Sorrow." "My voice ain't what it used to be. My tenor has thinned out some. It's got more cracks in it and it can get mighty rough around the edges and I can't hit all the high notes anymore. But . . . I know how to use it better. I can put more feeling in now. . . . I can worry those lines like I never could before."

Like no one ever could before, he might have said. And, now, like no one ever will.



DUES INFORMATION AND MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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. We want you to receive the newsletter in whichever format you prefer. To offset production and mailing costs, membership dues for those electing USPS hard copy of the newsletter are \$20.00. For those members choosing email delivery, annual dues are \$15.00 for an individual or family.

I would like to receive the newsletter: Email US Postal Service

I am joining as: New Member Renewal

Date:_____

Yearly membership runs April-April.

Please mail to: **Idaho Sawtooth Bluegrass Association**

c/o Rich Johnson

1544 W Dakota Loop

Nampa, ID 83686

**Have ideas, comments, questions, or concerns?
Want to get involved? Here's your Board of Directors:**

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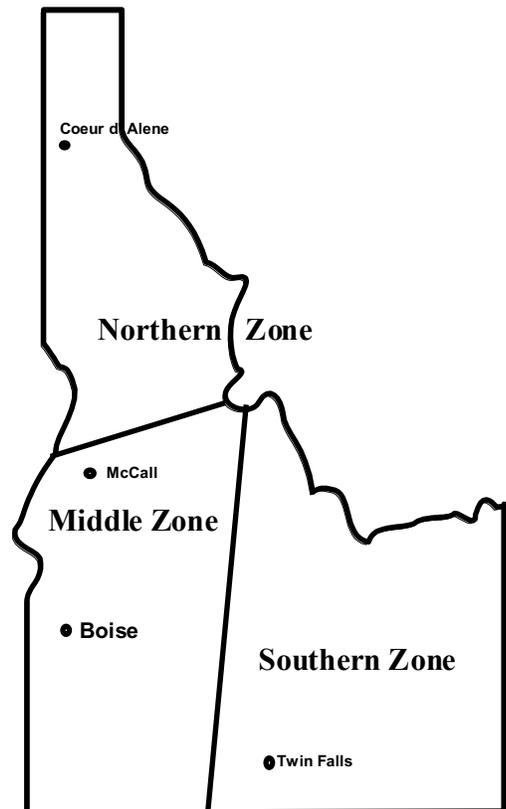
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Check us out on the web: www.idahosawtoothbluegrass.org



Ladd Canyon Ramblers



New South Fork



Hickory Bluff

11th Annual ISBA
Fall Festival
Sept 16th - 18th 2016
Snake River Heritage Center
Weiser, ID

Friday - 16th
 Bluegrass Open Mic

Saturday - 17th

Instrument Workshops - free

Bluegrass Concert

Ladd Canyon Ramblers

New South Fork

Hickory Bluff

Sunday - 18th
 Gospel Open Mic

For Camping -
 208.414.0255

For More Info -
 208.377.5326

isbassn@gmail.com

www.idahosawtoothbluegrass.org*
 No handicap access to the concert hall
 due to building's historical status

“Come for the weekend - Camp, pick and enjoy some great Bluegrass”



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