

Chairman's Report



Pete Ludé
CBA Board Chair

Bill Monroe was famously quoted as saying "Bluegrass has brought more people together and made more friends than any music in the world." I'm not quite sure how a fact-checker would go about confirming that statement, but from what I'm seeing, I think Bill was right. Even in these pandemic times, there has been a flurry of Bluegrass people coming together (mostly on Zoom) to work on some exciting new CBA projects. **We're happy to report that CBA's online webcast series – Turn Your Radio Online – is returning** with fantastic performers starting on Saturday evening April 24. The series will continue May 22 and, of course, on Father's Day weekend, Saturday June 19.

You can watch these live webcasts on www.TurnYourRadio.online or on the CBA Facebook page. We're hoping to hold an online version of the CBA Father's Day Music Camp in conjunction, as well. There are also plans in the works for the new online CBA Youth Academy, to keep our young folk busy learning music.

But don't get the idea that CBA is just about webcasts and online experiences. We're working hard to get together for jams, concerts, and festivals just as soon as this darn pandemic permits. CBA is currently planning our Fall Campout for October 11 to 17 at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds, the Great 48 Jam in Bakersfield next January, and maybe even a new jam and concert event in Southern California in-between. Plans are already underway for the 2022 Father's Day Festival, to be held June 16-19, 2022 in Grass Valley, so mark your calendar now.

Watch for more news on all of these upcoming events. We need to continue to prove that Bill Monroe called it right, and that more people really are coming together for Bluegrass.

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Butch Waller: 1990 Honorary Lifetime Member

Butch Waller has been a mainstay of the Northern California Bluegrass scene since the 1960s and has influenced many musicians in the Bay Area. Butch served two terms as CBA president in 1981-2. He is known nationally for his innovative and Monroe-style mandolin playing and for founding the West Coast's first premier traditional Bluegrass band, High Country, in 1968. High Country features hard-driving, traditional Bluegrass; Butch is the band's emcee and sings many of their songs. A gifted songwriter, Butch has written several tunes that have become festival standards, such as the Monroe-sounding *Butch's Blues*; *Blues for Your Own*, also recorded by Sally Van Meter and used in an episode of TV's *Northern Exposure*; and *A Voice on the Wind*, popularized by Hot Rize. Butch has also taught mandolin at several music camps.



Craig Wilson, Matt Dudman, Butch Waller

When the CBA was started in 1975, High Country performed at the CBA's first event, a fundraiser at the Fairfield Community Center and at several other CBA benefit concerts. High Country performed at the first CBA festival in 1976 and has played regularly at the CBA Father's Day festivals since then, including in 2018, when the band celebrated 50 years together. **High Country was the first West Coast band Bill Monroe invited to his Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival in Indiana**, and they played there several times in the early 1980s. Other prominent gigs included headlining the first Strawberry Festival in Yosemite in 1982. High Country played - often three nights a week - at the (in)famous Paul's Saloon in San Francisco for 20 years until it closed in 1991. The band also toured extensively in North America, Europe, and the South Pacific.

Phil Boerner, Breakdown Contributor

Bluegrass Bloodlines

Bluegrass is "Scottish bagpipes and ole-time fiddlin'. It's Methodist and Holiness and Baptist. It's blues and jazz, and it has a high lonesome sound." So said Bill Monroe, in what must be one of the quirkier descriptions of a musical genre ever written. Bluegrass is indeed an amalgam of many musical sources. Its sound harkens back to the porches of the Scots-Irish settlers in Appalachia and its ancient tones have reached around the world. As Neil Rosenberg notes "Like jazz and blues, Bluegrass is an American cultural export." More recently, this has become a two-way street.

Everywhere Bluegrass goes, it eventually becomes enriched by local musical inputs. Joe Troop of Che Apalache holds that Bluegrass is a "mongrel," a mashup that abhors pure bloodlines: its vocal and instrumental techniques transcend the genre itself and lend themselves to infinite soundscapes." Ever hear of "Celtgrass"? What the Scots-Irish immigrants brought to the US, was massaged and augmented till it became Bluegrass; then it was adopted by the Irish, who added their indigenous music into the mix, and are now sending it back to the US.

The European Bluegrass Music Association counts hundreds of members across the continent. **And as the Jam-a-Thon showed, Bluegrass has outposts in just about every corner of the world.**

The banjo may be the butt of countless jokes, but it was often the first instrument exported, just as it was arguably the first Bluegrass instrument to be imported to the US. The banjo was the prime mover in fully four of the six featured bands here, and nowhere more so than in what is now the Czech Republic, where the Tramping movement - replete with cowboy hats, campfires, "Red Indians," and ...banjos - helped keep
(continued on first column of the back page)

The CBA Board of Directors is sending this Bluegrass Breakdown newsletter to the Bluegrass and Old-time communities. We would like to thank current members for their support and we invite those who are not members to join the CBA here:
<https://www.cbaweb.org/About/Join>

independent spirits alive during the dark days in the Eastern Bloc. Today, the Czech Republic may be the single largest repository of Bluegrass bands outside the US.

Bluegrass's joyous sound and often mournful lyrics, born of hard times and suffering, spoke to the Irish and Czech communities. It began in a downhill town in Sweden and became a medium for environmental protest. And it began in the Winston-Salem, journeyed down to Argentina, and came back singing of social (in)justice.

The Bluegrass exodus to Spain and Holland is a bit more laid back: our featured bands just plain old loved Bluegrass and wanted to play it. Like the other bands, they went on to incorporate many regional musical themes.

Bluegrass is distinctly amenable to so many musical inputs from so many lands. With all these accretions, when does it just become something else? All of these bands are widely represented online. Just listen to them. You'll hear the roots.

Many thanks to Joe Troop, Loes van Schaijk, Christopher Howard-Williams, Leah Wollenberg, Lilly Pavlak, Lee Bidgood, Kajsa Westin, Kenneth Kjellgren, and Chris Keenan for their extensive help with this issue, and to Bruce Sadownick for his proof-reading and critiquing skills. **Editor**

Argentina

Joe Troop turned eighteen, gathered up his banjo and fiddle, left his Winston-Salem home, and headed east, then south. Six years later – in 2008 - he arrived in Argentina. Buenos Aires became his home for the next twelve years, and until he was stranded mid-tour by the pandemic, he had not lived in the US since the day he left. Now isolated, he finds himself an immigrant in his home country.



If you can't find a Bluegrass band, you have to make one. Upon arrival in Buenos Aires, Joe gave weekly music lessons to twenty students, played gigs on the weekends, and eventually developed a core of accomplished musicians, two Argentines and an ex-pat Mexican, who formed with Joe what came to be Che Apalache. That was



Maxida Märak and the Downhill Bluegrass Band



The Malina Brothers: Pepa, Lubos, Pavel Peroutka, Pavel Malina

in 2013. They played in halls and boliches around town, and as their chops improved, they started dreaming of touring the world.

Che Apalache began, as so many bands do, covering the Stanleys and the Monroes. The local audiences related to their sound because – well, who wouldn't like the old masters' music! But Joe discovered that the Bluegrass instrumentation is well suited to the native Tangos, Zambas, Chacareras, and the Chamamés (an Argentine accordion-based music which itself had developed from Austrian and German roots); these and the other sounds he heard in his Once barrio - home to Peruvians, Bolivians, and Polish Orthodox Jews who had fled the Holocaust - are imprinted on the band's music.

Bombos, bandoneones, charangos, and harpas gave way to banjo – strummed and drummed, guitar, fiddle, and mandolin, but the music remained true to form. Boliche shouting takes on *Uncle Pen*. *María* and *Prisionero* are straight out of Andean folklórico.

As Joe explains it, "Bluegrass is a mongrel that, as the product of multiple influences, abhors pure bloodlines: a music whose vocal and instrumental techniques that were pioneered under the guise of Bluegrass transcend the genre itself and lend themselves to infinite soundscapes."



Che Apalache: Martín, Joe, Pau, Franco

In the spring of 2017, Che Apalache began the first of nine tours that extended as far as Alaska. Their shows ranged from shape note singing to Cumbia-infused Bluegrass to songs of social justice.

Today, Pau and Franco are back in Buenos Aires and Martín in Mexico City. Joe, equally adept on all Bluegrass instruments, is working on an upcoming solo album. Anyone who has lived extensively abroad is clear-eyed about the shortcomings of their native home. *Covid Revelations* reviles prejudice. *The Dreamer* is dedicated to DACA children. This will be Joe's world till the band reassembles. **Editor**

The Netherlands

Dutch Queen Maxima, herself an Argentine, once caused national turmoil by saying the Dutch identity does not exist. Indeed, this trade nation's focus has always been more outward than inward. A Dutch folk music revival in the early 1970s was short-lived. By mid-decade, urban interest in bagpipes, barrel organs, and wooden-soled clog dancing – along with lyrics involving windmills and dykes – had petered out, and the nation's youth had turned back to imported music. Since then, Holland has seen the rise of many excellent Bluegrass bands; were they informed by regional music or simply just another cultural import?

Bluegrass Bloodlines



Red Herring - Joram, Paul, Loes, Arthur

Loes van Schaijk, the bass player in Red Herring, one of Holland's premier Bluegrass bands, attempted to answer this question in her university masters thesis about Bluegrass music in the Netherlands. This endeavor proved frustrating: most of the people she interviewed stressed that their love of Bluegrass was a reflection of nothing more than their plain old personal taste and experience, and thus did not conform to some historical-cultural theory involving regional influences

In its own odd way Red Herring seems to display "true Dutchness" with their brilliant *Pigs Upon A Ninja*. The song opens with Norwegian and Canadian fiddle playing, then sets off to the Hot Club de France for a lashing of Gypsy jazz, only to finish up in Ireland. The multi-geographical and ethnic band is, too, a reflection of this quintessential Dutch outwardness.

When Joram and Arthur—the two founders of Red Herring—met in 2012, they started from their common ground, which was roots music with a hint of Bluegrass, mostly for drunk, loud pub audiences who just wanted to stomp their feet. The later additions of Loes (2013) and Paul (2015) to the band amplified the Bluegrass part of the equation. Red Herring's sound and repertoire was mostly shaped by the band's encounters on their travels. Jam sessions at international Bluegrass and multi-genre festivals have been great opportunities to make new friends from other countries or backgrounds and exchange tunes with them. Knowing that, if you listen to *Pigs Upon A Ninja* once more, you might even be able to visualize those encounters that have all left their mark on the songwriter Joram's technique and creativity and ultimately complement each other perfectly, as Loes says, "like a wildflower bouquet".

Editor with Loes van Schaijk

Spain/Catalonia

In 2014 Lluís Gómez played a twin banjo set with Tony Trischka at Al Ras festival in Barcelona. After the show, he realized he

had played all of Tony's licks ("because he's a genius!"). Tony agreed and said that, as Lluís was playing Tony Trischka, he had tried to be someone else!! It was a key moment in Lluís's musical education.

After starting classical guitar at 15, Lluís was "found by the banjo" at 20. In post-Franco, pre-internet Spain, there was little Bluegrass, but with the Pete Seeger banjo instruction book, slowed-down vinyls, and later Home Spun Tapes, he threw himself into the banjo. When asked why he didn't play Spanish tunes, he explained his focus was on learning to play Bluegrass banjo!

Soon after the Trischka show, Martino Coppo of the Italian band Red Wine told him "you should play your music, it's so beautiful!" Then Bela Fleck asked him to play something Spanish at his banjo camp. Lluís knew *El Cant dels Ocells*, the famous piece played by Pablo Casals at the Kennedy White House in 1961. He played it for Bela's main show to great applause.

Already one of Europe's most recognised banjo players, Lluís could sound like most of his heroes. These three anecdotes led him to reconsider his playing.



Carol Duran, Maribel Rivero, Lluís Gómez

Europe's rich folklore includes Gypsy Jazz, Klezmer, Flamenco, and French musette ("I love musette!"). Lluís believes European artists can and should bring this heritage back into Bluegrass, taking it beyond a reproduction of the traditional American sound.

Maribel Ribero, his partner, teaches classical guitar and plays bass with him. With friends from the local Barcelona folk scene, they started work on a new, Spanish-oriented album and put together a Flamenco inspired show for the CBA Jam-a-Thon.

His classical guitar training was an important foundation for understanding dynamics, musicality, and especially 'interpretation' of music. **Incorporating his Spanish heritage into his banjo playing, Lluís is now finding another voice and opening new windows into the instrument.** When music goes live again, he intends to release the new album and take it on the road, and hopefully showcase his Flamenco-grass at IBMA.

Christopher Howard-Williams is the founder and director of the La Roche Bluegrass Festival in the French Alps.

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Czech Republic

The Malina Brothers formed when brothers Luboš, Pavel, and Josef (Pepa) were persuaded to play a festival close by their hometown of Nachod, near the Czech-Polish border. They recruited veteran bassist Pavel Peroutka and soon expanded the scope of the band. Luboš Malina is known for his work with Druhá Tráva, a Czech band that has toured in the U.S. since the mid-1990s. He brings to the band his interest in Irish music (and low whistles), his wide-ranging instrumental skills (he sometimes plays saxophone and clarinet, which were instruments he studied in his early career in a military band), and has a reputation as one of the top Czech banjoists and bandleaders.

Pavel Malina covers the guitar front, playing acoustic rhythm and lead—and also bringing out a Fender Stratocaster for some more country-flavored numbers. Pavel has a long career in the bands of singers like Pavlína Jišová, Věra Martinová, and Pavel Žalman Lohonka, as well as years working in the top Bluegrass bands Fragment and Druhá Tráva. Fiddle player Pepa Malina, youngest of the brothers, brings a wealth of experience in jazz and a range of string band forms; he is an alumnus of top Czech bands Monogram and Cop. Also a photographer, Pepa makes the band's publicity images and serves as the band's manager.

The Malinas' shows include American songs, Czech-retexted covers, as well as





Maxida, Kajsa, Kenneth, Jonas, and the Downhill Bluegrass Band

songs by local songwriters and re-texters Stanislav Skala and Miroslav Jaroš (the richness of Czech texted songs is one distinctive aspect of the Czech Bluegrass community—few scenes outside the United States have such a rich vernacular repertoire). The group also crosses genre boundaries with *Skočná*, a dance taken from Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's opera *The Bartered Bride*, a tune that Luboš recorded with the Brno band Poutníci in the 1980s.

With a 2015 release in collaboration with Nashville veteran Charlie McCoy, a U.S. tour in 2016, and a well-produced DVD that celebrated *Deset Let Na Scéně* (Ten Years on the Scene) in 2020 that features McCoy as a guest artist, the group are poised to emerge from the current pandemic as a key part of the Czech scene.

Lee Bidgood, Department of Appalachian Studies and Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music Studies at East Tennessee State University

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Sweden

Perhaps the location explains it. Bergslagen, some two hours' drive west of Stockholm, lies in the iron ore mining region of Sweden. It's a rural, hardscrabble place that fell on hard times during the worldwide steel crisis of the 1970s and never fully recovered. Kenneth and Jonas Kjellgren grew up there as it started going downhill. It reminded them of stories they had heard about Appalachia.

Kenneth fell in love with the banjo after watching *Deliverance* in 1978.

"I had no idea what to do with it; it took me a year to figure out you need finger-picks." Then, somehow, a JD Crowe album showed up and the brothers came to learn "the timing and the pulse of the music." By 1981, a few musicians had emerged, and four years later the incipient Swedish Bluegrass community hosted the Torsåker Bluegrass Festival.

For thirty years, Downhill has had but one constant: Warren and Jonas - on mandolin. The guitar players in particular were, as Kenneth relates laconically, "not reliable. They come and they go." But for many years, Kajsa Westin held down the bass section. This is where the story gets really interesting.

Kajsa's goddaughter, Maxida Mäarak, is a native Sami, a reindeer-herding indigenous people from northern Sweden above the Arctic Circle. In 2011, a British mining company (called, ominously, Beowulf) was seeking to exploit ore in the Sami region, threatening the Sami way of life. Maxida, a Sami activist and one of Sweden's most influential hip-hop and rap musicians, had discovered Bluegrass through Kajsa. "The more you listen to Bluegrass [lyrics], the more common ground you find with Sami culture. [The music] sounds quite cheerful, but they sing about mining and abuse," she realized. In short, Bluegrass would be the perfect musical vehicle to take on Beowulf.

Jonas and Maxida decided on a duet version of *East of the Mountains*, the title track of a Downhill release from 2002 that Jonas had written as an environmental jeremiad. The verse begins "I stood on the mountain and looked down below" and it ends "I hang my head down and I cry." Then Maxida solos with a chilling *joik*, the indigenous Sami chant. If you didn't get the point before, you get it now.

Bluegrass has never seen the likes of this. The band and Maxida went on to record *Mountain Songs and Other Stories*, which included some straight up Bluegrass numbers such as *Darling Corey* - in both English and Sami!

Afterwards, Maxida went back to hip-hop; Kajsa moved to Stockholm to continue with Hillfillies, an all-women Bluegrass band; Downhill plays all over Europe and has been invited to IBMA twice. Beowulf is still trying to get their claws into the Sami land.

Editor

Ireland

Irish Bluegrass? Not so long ago, "Bluegrass" was a word unfamiliar with the general population in Ireland. But Bluegrass was there, nonetheless. A handful of talented Irish musicians, bands, and fans were determined to devote their hearts to it. Not so strange, since Bluegrass roots are connected with the Irish and Scottish settlers in the US. Fiddles, mandolins, and banjos are prevalent in both Irish and American traditional music. **Just as the early residents of Appalachia suffered significant hardship, the Irish have endured centuries of oppression and heartache.** There's no denying the connection, both musically and spiritually.

Then along came We Banjo 3. Featuring two sets of brothers, this exciting, dynamic band from Galway, Ireland are taking the Bluegrass world by storm. Less than a decade since their first American tour, WB3 have gathered momentum like a runaway freight train. From Grey Fox to ROMP to Wintergrass, and everywhere in between, they have truly embraced the love, friendship, and genuine connection between the Irish and American traditions. WB3 seamlessly blend Americana, Bluegrass, and traditional Irish music. They call it "Celtgrass."



We Banjo 3: Enda Scahill, Martin Howley, Fergal Scahill, David Howley

The band was inspired by the journey of the banjo, tracing it backwards from Ireland to the US to Africa. Exploring the unsinkable spirit and energy of the banjo....understanding the role of the instrument in bringing solace to so many who have suffered.

"There is an energy and spirit in the banjo that is inextricably linked to Bluegrass. As Irish banjo players, we have always been drawn back to the source of the sound. It is impossible to fully separate Bluegrass music from the banjo," says Enda Scahill, main banjoiist of WB3.

And now the band sees part of its mission as continuing to bring joy, solace, escape, and comfort to music fans across the world. Now more than ever....

Chris Keenan is an event producer, tour booker, and artist manager based in Ireland