



# Bluegrassin

Volume 6, Issue 1

January-February 2004

*The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association is a non-profit association dedicated to promoting, preserving and sharing our love of bluegrass music in a spirit of family and friendship.*

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## Bluegrass Calendar

- ♦ **Jan 24, 2004** – There will be a jam in Deer Lodge on January 24, 2004 from 12:00 noon until ????. We will have that jam at a new location at 511 Main Street. This is right across the street from the Post Office. It is an office building where there will be room for three or four jams. Please park around back along side of the bowling alley. We will provide a dinner meal for \$5.00 per person. Motel rooms are available at Scharf's Motor Inn for \$42.95. For a reservation call 846-2810. Hope the roads are good and everyone can make it. If you have questions call Bill Anderson at 846-1843 or email to [ambeck@imine.net](mailto:ambeck@imine.net).
- ♦ **Feb 18, 2004** – The MRBA will sponsor a performance by Chris Stuart and Backcountry at the Crystal Theater, Missoula, MT. The show will begin at 7:00 p.m. Ross Gander, a local singer/songwriter will open the show. Tickets are \$12.00 for the general public and \$10.00 for MRBA and Missoula Folklore Society members. Tickets will be on sale at Rockin' Rudy's the week of the performance and at the door.
- ♦ **Feb 20-24, 2004** – **BLUEGRASS JOURNEY**, a feature-length independent documentary about contemporary bluegrass music produced and directed by Hudson Valley, New York filmmakers Ruth Oxenberg and Rob Schumer, has been selected to screen at the 2004 Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, February 20-25, 2004 at the Roxy Theater in downtown Missoula, Montana. General information about the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival is at <http://highplainsfilms.org/festival/index.htm>. The specific date(s) of the screening have not been announced as of this time.
- ♦ **Feb 26-29, 2004** – Wintergrass, Sheraton Tacoma Hotel, Tacoma, WA. More details at [www.wintergrass.com](http://www.wintergrass.com) or call (253) 428-8056. Sam Bush, Hot Rize, Seldom Scene, Country Current and many more are on the bill. The MRBA and Bitterroot Valley Bluegrass Festival will host a hospitality suite (Suite 1200) at Wintergrass. Please contact Phyllis Erck at [phyllis@erckhotels.com](mailto:phyllis@erckhotels.com) if you are going to Wintergrass and would be interested in volunteering some time giving out information about the association and the Hamilton festival.

## Recurring Show and Jams

- ♦ Every Tuesday night 6-10 p.m. – Bluegrass jam at the VFW, 10th Avenue South, Great Falls. Call Pat at 453-8003 for more information.
- ♦ Every Tuesday night, 7 p.m. – Open bluegrass jam at the Top Hat, 134 W. Front Street, Missoula followed by Pinegrass around 10 p.m.
- ♦ Every Thursday night, 6-8 p.m. – Live bluegrass with Mountain Groan and Friends at the Golden Corral, Hwy 93S, Missoula. Call Raynae at 721-5205 for information.
- ♦ 3d Friday Each Month – Bluegrass jam at the Avalanche Creek Coffeehouse, 1st Avenue East, Kalispell. Contact Vicki at 257-3935 or [ybodfish@digisys.net](mailto:ybodfish@digisys.net) for information.



## New Editor for the Newsletter

**Tari Conroy is taking over as editor of the newsletter. You may contact Tari at [tariconroy@hotmail.com](mailto:tariconroy@hotmail.com) or at (406) 821-3777.**

## Prez's Notes



As I sit here at my computer, I'm having a hard time organizing my thoughts for these last notes to all of you. I start something and then erase it and start again as all the emotions run through my head. Words cannot express my feelings towards all of you and what your support and friendship has meant to me these last five years. As I reflect back on the start up of this association my mind drifts back to that first night I introduced it to everyone. Some of you will remember, I had organized a bi-weekly jam at the local Pizza Hut here in town. I just wanted some place that we could gather and play bluegrass; a place that the public could enjoy listening to us, and a place that was convenient for everyone to come together and play. I had been toying around with starting an association here in our area and earlier that Fall, had visited with the president of the Yellowstone Valley Bluegrass assoc. for help in what I needed to do to get started. He guided me in the direction I needed to go, and I took it from there typing up by-laws, and policy and procedures as he had directed me to do. I then went to the IRS and got us non-profit status and a tax ID number. Then I typed up a simple little newsletter and made up membership

cards. I took them to the Pizza Hut jam that next week, and asked everyone there if they were interested in joining. That first night I took a handful of memberships including Ian Fleming and his family, Jeff Campfield, Larry Gangi Sr. and Jr. and myself of course, along with a few others that were there. The following weekend I took the idea and presented it to several folks at a jam that I had organized down in Hamilton at the local Hardee's. I remember Bill Molenda, Mike and Tari, the Silchers, Winston Wanstrath, and several others joining up that week. Bill Molenda made me write on the back of his membership card which member number he was, telling me that if this took off he wanted to be able to know that he was the 9th member to join. We were off and running and we actually had an association, with about a dozen members. Each week more of you joined and showed confidence and support of the assoc. Now here we are just a five years later and our membership is right around 235 members. It gives me such joy to realize that our association is a real strong viable one that has done so much to promote bluegrass in our area and has brought so much fun into our lives. The association has been able to bring bluegrass to the public, and gain some new loyal fans of the music. Now as Ben takes over as the first new president, I'm excited to see the new direction our association is going to take. Ben is going to be an awesome president and is already working hard and spending a lot of time to bring to pass some great ideas that are going to be real fun for us. This association is organized for one reason and one reason only, that is to have fun and promote our music so that even more people can have

fun with it. That's why each of us play bluegrass, to simply have fun. I hope we all keep this in mind as this new year starts out and our new leadership takes over. We need to remember to say thank you to them because it takes a lot of time and work to make these activities happen. Some ideas we as a presidency had started will continue on and get even better. We'll also have some fresh new ideas that'll take us down new roads to better bluegrass'n' times ahead. I'm excited to take on my new duties as a board member, in charge of booking concerts that our association will sponsor. I enjoy trying new ideas to make our concerts fun and unique, and will have fun trying some of those ideas out. I have several thoughts for future concerts that will be fun and different to hopefully encourage our membership and the public to come out and support them. I worked hard over at the IBMA to promote our association and the Bitterroot Valley Bluegrass Festival. I've already been contacted by several of the bands that I talked with, so am hoping to be able to book a few of them this year.

As I turn our association over to Ben, our new president, it's an exciting time for me. I can enjoy the new ideas and fun times ahead. Ben has some great fresh ideas for us, and like I said has already been working very hard for all of us. I think with his leadership, we're going to have one of our best ever bluegrass'n' years ahead of us. Let's all take this new year to look forward in our directions with what we love to do best in life, playing bluegrass, and having lot's of laughs with our friends. Your grassin' friend, Raynae

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT ELECT



I want to begin by thanking the membership for your confidence in electing me president of the association. You can be assured that I will do my best to maintain the MRBA as an important force in performing, preserving and promoting bluegrass music. Above all, I work to keep the association a fun place to get together and make bluegrass music.

I can't go any further without thanking Raynae Redman for her contributions. Raynae started the MRBA and without her effort, it simply would not exist. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for the work she has done for the association. She is now on the board of directors and I look forward to her continued con-

tribution to the MRBA.

After being around the association for the past two years, I see four main activities to help the association and its membership achieve our goals of performing, preserving and promoting bluegrass music:

- Enhance opportunities to get together and play. This has got to be the centerpiece of the association in my mind. We need to have opportunities throughout the year for folks to get together and play.
- Help members develop and broaden their musical skills. There is a lot we can do in this area if we can get some volunteer support. Mike Conroy has mentioned holding some short sessions to develop interest in harmony singing and other instruments. We just don't have a lot of folks with good harmony singing skills. Beyond guitar and stand up bass, we don't see an overabundance of mandolin, dobro, banjo and fiddle players. We will hold these sessions at the campouts and also schedule some sessions at convenient locations.
- Increase our membership. We have been fairly steady in the number of association memberships. Development and maintenance of membership has got to

be a high priority if we are to maintain the association as a viable entity.

- Expand our activities to promote and preserve bluegrass music. One opportunity is to sponsor concerts by professional bluegrass bands. We held successful and well attended concerts by Chris Stuart and Backcountry and Special Consensus this fall and we have some more performances in the planning stage. Another opportunity to promote bluegrass music is through a program to introduce the music in the schools. Arlene Wolf volunteered to develop some information on what may be possible. I know that IBMA sponsors a bluegrass in the schools program and may be able to help since the association is an IBMA member.

Where do you fit in the association? We always need help in maintaining and developing the association. Please contact me if you have other ideas and would like to pitch in.

I look forward to working with you and wish you the best this Holiday Season.

Ben Essary

## Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association

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**Secretary/Treasurer** – Pam Essary (406) 777-7028 [pamessary@msn.com](mailto:pamessary@msn.com)

**Board Members** – Bill Anderson, Jeff Campfield, Tari Conroy, Larry Gangi, Raynae Redman, Houston Rushing, Arlene Wolf

**Newsletter Editor** – Tari Conroy 821-3777 [tariconroy@hotmail.com](mailto:tariconroy@hotmail.com)

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## **OPINION PIECE SALLY JOHNSON'S RESPONSE TO KATY HILL**

*By  
BILL NEAVES*

In reading the November/December issue of this publication, I have to admit I found myself a bit disgruntled with "Katy Hill's" comments regarding "noodling." It seemed there were certain biases and assumptions Katy operated from and the rest of the readers are supposed to take these as gospel truth and follow Katy's logic/beliefs accordingly. I intend to address some of these issues here; but, more importantly, would then leave it up to the reader regarding where their own individual "truth" regarding what noodling really is. To me, the first sign of faulty logic, is one that states there is only one "truth" regarding issues such as music i.e. one "right way" to play a song, one "right tempo," one "right instrumentation," one "right harmony," and even "one right way to JAM." Let's ALL keep in mind that most of the founding "fathers" of this genre of music were REBELS of their time. They were playing their instruments in ways no one had ever dreamed of before and frankly, many of the traditionalists disapproved of. As time marched on, their visions gained popularity and more and more folks attempted to re-create, emulate, and adhere to the "standards" set forth by that particular master. Make no mistake, if the masters were not allowed to create and rebel from traditions, we would not have bluegrass music as we know it today. But I digress...

A previous article described noodling as something like "all the noise you hear people making on their instruments between song." Katy then goes on to state "Inspired, some club members have taken up the torch to stamp it out, a valiant effort no doubt." Why is that a valiant effort? And, have we really defined noodling or are we making an assumption that it is nothing more than the

above definition i.e. "all the noise you hear people making on their instruments between songs." As a professional musician of many years, and more importantly, a music teacher to many, I would suggest this definition is not only inaccurate, but ignorant. How many of you get inspired during a jam with others (you play a song, a phrase, or even a chord that you've never played before)? I would hope that when inspiration strikes, you take the opportunity to play it again a time or two, so you can remember it well enough to take it home with you and add it to your "arsenal" of musical tools. Is jamming supposed to be devoid of any opportunity to learn? I'm not suggesting one practices so much between songs that it truly disrupts the jam and brings it to a halt. However, recently I've seen people reluctant to play ANYTHING between songs because they're worried one of the Jam "Patrols" will call them on it. That strikes me as controlling and wrong. How about the "in song noodling" issue. Is Katy really suggesting she's never fiddled around with a few notes preparing to take a solo on a tune she's never played before? Any accomplished player who tells you they've never done this (to any degree) is simply not giving you all the straight scoop. In fact, I would suggest it is the more accomplished player who has been "more at fault" with this sin than the beginning musician. What better opportunity to get a feel for the song (you've never heard before) than to play along a bit before your break? Yes, taste is important. Discretion is important. But as we all know, abstracts such as taste and discretion are completely subjective and difficult to "fit into a controlled box." Does that mean we should not therefore use them? No. Does this leave the possibility as Katy suggests that "in every little nook, cranny, space or pause between each vocal phrase there comes forth a barrage of notes from more instruments then you can shake your favorite fiddle bow at?" YES! Listen carefully here - IT'S A JAM! I play plenty of "professional gigs" with all of the professional "protocol" to go along with it - all the fills in the right place, song lists carefully planned out, instrumentation issued fully addressed, harmonies worked out, "space between songs" worked out, etc...

When I come out to jam with friends, my intentions are not to create a professional "product," rather, I look forward to spending time sharing music with friends, many of whom I don't see enough of during the busyness of life. I would suggest this. If you find yourself as one of the musicians upset by noodling, perhaps you should get a professional band together so you can play under controlled/professional protocol, and get paid! Then, when you come out to jam with friends, the need to re-create what you already do during paid gigs goes away - you can kick up your heels and just have a good time. I know a lot of people from professional/touring bluegrass bands that LOVE to jam (in all its looseness) because they get plenty of the "play by the rules" performances with their bands on the road. If this solution doesn't sit well with you, one could always try communicating to others around him/her and letting them know this is not a "noodle friendly" zone. That way, the people that want to play a few extra inspired notes can search out others who may be more open to this process. No-Noodlers can also identify other No-Noodlers and jam exclusively with them, if desired. I think the bottom line is this. There are many different types of jams, and people have a variety of reasons for wanting to jam. Some noodle, some don't. I just have a problem with people who pretend to have been given "Divine Knowledge" on the issue and clearly state it IS wrong. If you can get your hands on old Live (and unedited) recordings, you may be surprised at the amount of noodling that goes on, especially among the "Masters." I feel it's important to note this fact, again because it has been suggested to the readers that this process of noodling is somehow wrong, unaccepted, and needs correction. I believe in calling it like it is, and I can tell you that there are players out there (many of whom Katy would shake in her boots to even get the chance to meet, let alone play with) that can out noodle any noodler in our organization (and does during jams). (Cont'd page 7)

## **Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association 2003 Annual Membership Meeting Minutes**

The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association 2003 Annual Membership Meeting was held on November 8, 2003, at Ruby's Inn, Missoula Montana. Raynae Redman, President, chaired the meeting.

### **Financial Statement**

Pam Essary, Secretary/Treasurer, gave a summary of the annual financial statement. MRBA started the year with \$1,981.82. There was income of \$6,145.33 and expenses of \$5,840.52. Current bank balance is \$2,286.63. A copy of the statement is included as Attachment 1.

### **Old Business**

The issue of MRBA sponsoring a campout during the summer was discussed. It was agreed that MRBA should hold a campout during this period. Location was discussed. It was decided that the incoming president would appoint a committee to look at the issue.

The location of the annual MRBA festival held in April of each year was discussed. It was agreed that alternate locations should be considered. Mike Conroy and Ben Essary will investigate potential alternate locations for the festival.

### **New Business**

The future of the MRBA website was discussed. The membership approved purchasing an appropriate domain for use. The first choice was mtbluegrass.com and the alternate was mrbluegrass.com. Greg Boyd and Phyllis Erck will investigate the availability of these domains and purchase one if available.

Volunteer staffing support of an MRBA hospitality suite at the Wintergrass Festival was discussed. This suite is being provided by Wintergrass at no charge. Volunteers were asked to sign up on a signup sheet, which was available.

Richard Lacey, Bitterroot Valley Bluegrass Festival Board of Directors, gave a presentation on sponsorship of the BVBF. After discussion, the membership voted to approve a \$300.00 sponsorship of the BVBF.

### **Election of Officers**

The membership elected the following members to the positions indicated. The officers will assume their positions on January 1, 2004.

President:	Ben Essary	
Vice President:	Mike Conroy	
Secretary/Treasurer:	Pam Essary	
Board Members:	Bill Anderson	Raynae Redman
	Jeff Campfield	Houston Rushing
	Tari Conroy	Arlene Wolf
	Larry Gangi	

## MONTANA ROCKIES BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION 2003 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

STARTING BALANCE \$ 1,981.82

INCOME\* \$ 6,145.33

Memberships*	\$ 1,950.00
Advertising	\$ 660.00
Merchandise*	\$ 1,989.07
Victor Admission*	\$ 900.00
Victor Food	\$ 527.50
Bank Interest	\$ 0.70
Account Adjustment	\$ 118.06

EXPENSES \$ 5,840.52

Postage	\$ 489.87
Printing	\$ 725.44
IBMA Membership	\$ 150.00
MRBA Banners	\$ 400.00
Victor School Rental	\$ 200.00
Valentine's Dinner Food	\$ 400.00
Merchandise	\$ 1,540.92
Office Supplies	\$ 67.45
Victor Festival Recording	\$ 270.00
MRBA CDs	\$ 756.70
Association License	\$ 15.00
MRBA Bumper Stickers	\$ 534.85
Deer Lodge Jam Expenses	\$ 61.60
Bank Charges	\$ 14.70
The Jack Donation	\$ 50.00
Hamilton Floral	\$ 38.99
BVBF Festival Donation	\$ 75.00
Chantilly Theater Rental	\$ 50.00

ENDING BALANCE \$ 2,286.63

\*The total for income is correct. The amounts for memberships, merchandise and Victor admission are close estimates since detailed records of the sources of income from Victor and some other deposits were not recorded.

**Membership Application**  
**MONTANA ROCKIES BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION**  
 333 Pine Hollow Road, Stevensville, MT 59870

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Individual (\$10.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Family (\$15.00) \_\_\_\_\_

(Cont'd from page 4)

### Opinion Piece

Why is it okay for the bluegrass elite to noodle, but not us local folks? Is it the quality of noodling that determines the appropriateness. I would suggest not. Many of us, Katy included, also know that noodling can be a lot of fun. As Katy acknowledges, many might think "darn, these people are taking all the fun out of this pickin' thing." Katy goes on to acknowledge that people that think this might be right. I'm glad to see Katy lightened up with this. I've seen too many music associations die out because the core element and life of the association [fun] was squelched out of it. I hope that doesn't happen to this fine organization that's done such a great job promoting this wonderful musical genre. As for me, if we happen to have the opportunity to pick sometime, just know, noodle or not, it's all good. I hope each of you search out your heart, not only in regards to noodling, but in regards to what you really want out of this music. I would encourage you to follow your own inspiration and not have it defined by others who want to force your playing into a predetermined "box." If an expert is telling you "there's only one right way [for you]" I'd move on to the next expert for advice. Sincerely, Sally Johnson (Bill Neaves). *(ed, note: I don't know about you but I think we have just about beat this noodling thing to death and any other noodling comments can be made face-to-face)*

### NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Debbie Kerns – practice more on the bass and learn a few licks, to learn how to sing and play at the same time

Raynae Redman – learn to give the right groove and feel to each song I play on the bass

Phyllis Erck – not tell any banjo jokes and to learn to play my banjo this year

Ben Essary – practice, practice, practice, pick, pick, pick and continue to accept constructive criticism from Mike Conroy in the spirit it is intended – I think!

Tari Conroy – try not to tell as many banjo jokes

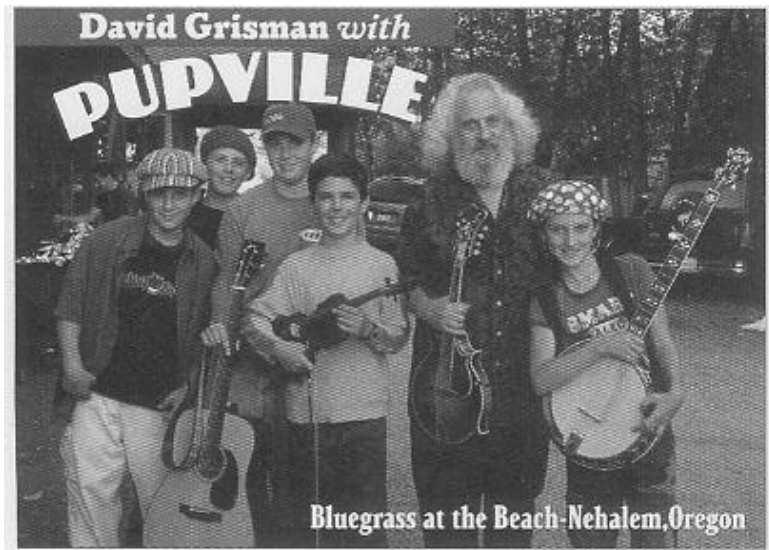
Mike Conroy – try not to help Ben as much (even if he needs it)

### Bluegrass Harmony Workshop

**1:00 p.m., Saturday, March 6, 2004**

Mike and Tari Conroy will host a bluegrass harmony workshop at Pam and Ben Essary's home, 333 Pine Hollow Road, Stevensville, MT. The workshop will be Saturday, March 6th beginning at 1:00 p.m. Admission is free. Bring your tape recorders. Contact Mike or Tari at 821-3777 or on email for Mike at [Tariconroy@webtv.net](mailto:Tariconroy@webtv.net) or Tari at [tariconroy@hotmail.com](mailto:tariconroy@hotmail.com)

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### **MRBA HAS NEW WEBSITE**

Thanks to the hard work of Larry Gangi and Phyllis Erck, the MRBA has a new website up and running at [mtbluegrass.com](http://mtbluegrass.com). For now the site has some basic information but more features will be added in the near future. The website is being hosted by Centric Internet Services (see adjacent ad) at no charge to the MRBA. If you have good computer skills and are interested in working on the website or have ideas on content for the site contact Phyllis at [phyllis@erckhotels.com](mailto:phyllis@erckhotels.com) or Ben Essary at [bgessary@msn.com](mailto:bgessary@msn.com).

MONTANA ROCKIES BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION MEMBERS  
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*Is your membership due for renewal? The date on the address label shows the month your membership is due.*