



Bluegrassin'

Volume 19, Issue 1

Jan—Feb 2017

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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Upcoming Bluegrass Events

- Jan. 14** - MRBA Winter Jam Series, Missoula, Ruby's Inn. Pickin' and grinnin' starts at 2:00 pm. Potluck at 6:00 followed by more pickin' and grinnin'
- Jan. 21** - Hazel Hue, Phillipsburg Brewing Co., Phillipsburg
- Jan. 27** - Lochwood Bluegrass, Top Hat, Missoula, 6:00 pm
- Jan. 28** - Mike and Tari Conroy, Stevensville Playhouse, 7:30 pm. (See pg. 5)
- Jan. 28** - Lochwood Bluegrass, Bitterroot Brewery, Hamilton, 6:00 pm
- Feb. 3** - Hazel Hue, Pine Creek Lodge, Livingston
- Feb. 11** - MRBA Winter Jam Series, Missoula, Ruby's Inn. Pickin' and grinnin' starts at 2:00 pm. Potluck at 6:00 followed by more pickin' and grinnin'
- Feb. 17** - Leftover Biscuits, Eagles, Columbia Falls, 7:00 pm
- Feb. 18** - Acousticals, Phillipsburg Brewing Co., Phillipsburg, 5:00 pm
- Feb. 23-27** - Wintergrass, Bellevue, WA <http://www.wintergrass.com/>

SAVE THE DATE

- March 11** - MRBA Winter Jam Series, Missoula, Ruby's Inn. Pickin' and grinnin' starts at 2:00 pm. Potluck at 6:00 followed by more pickin' and grinnin'
- April 22** - MRBA Spring Festival at Lone Rock School in Stevensville

Note: Dates and times are subject to change. Please check with venue prior to event.

Recurring Shows and Jams

- ◆ **Missoula**—Open Jam, Top Hat, Tuesdays, 6:00 pm
- **Helena** - Bluegrass Jam, Staggering Ox, Tuesdays, 6:00 pm

Please send information on open jams and shows to the newsletter editor.

MRBA X-mas Party Photos



Girls Just Want to Have Fun

Jammin' Time



Howdy!
From the
MRBA
X-mas Party

Everybody loves Forrest



Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association

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Merchandise Manager - Dallas Olson

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MRBA Webmaster - Phyllis Erck mrba@mtbluegrass.com

Bluegrassin' is a bi-monthly publication of the **Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association**

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Please mail your application to: MRBA, PO Box 1306, Missoula, MT 59806

**MONTANA ROCKIES BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL METING MINUTES**

December 3, 2016, 3:00 p.m., Ruby's Inn, Missoula, MT

Board Members Present: Mike Conroy, Dallas Olson, Anne Merrifield

Officers Present: Tari Conroy, Kate McMahan, Verna Molenda

The meeting was called to order by President Mike Conroy. The following items were discussed:

1. Update on the Association (Mike). Mike provided the 2017 Ruby's jam dates (January 14, February 11, March 11) and the date of the 2016 Lone Rock Festival (April 22). He reminded members of MRBA's Facebook page and website. Stevensville Hootenanny in November was a success, with new members and younger people onstage. MRBA's campout will be June 23-25 at Forrest Flats in 2017.
2. Financial Report (Anne). Anne read the 2015 Minutes, which were approved. She presented the 2016 financial report (through November 30, 2016), which is in the MRBA files for reference. Income was \$6,535.98, expenses \$6,679.47, for a positive difference of \$493.79. Checkbook balance is \$6,535.98. The cost of the Forrest Flats event was \$606.07, and MRBA made a profit of \$2,007.50 from Lone Rock.

Memberships have fallen to 188 (from 230 last year), and members were encouraged to recruit others to join. Re the newsletters, we mail hard copies to 88 people at a cost of \$1.83 per issue, and we e-mail 105 copies. Kate suggested that members bring newsletter copies to events they attend or provide them to local music stores. She also indicated that the "traveling newsletter" articles have been popular. Steve Chapman mentioned friends who were hesitant to join because they didn't play, and we should encourage them to join in support of the organization.
3. Merchandise (Dallas). Dallas reported that a large order of new merchandise was due in time for the winter jams (new hoodie sweatshirts, coffee cups, hats, t-shirts, etc). She encouraged members to assist with the merchandise table at Lone Rock.
4. Old Business (Mike). The Forrest Flats event will be held at the same location as previous years.
5. New Business (Mike). Mike needs more band participation at Lone Rock and encouraged members to either participate or recruit others to do so. Susan McCauley stated that the "grand finale" event at this festival was popular. If members have band suggestions, they should contact Mike, as he sends out band emails the first week in January.

Susan McCauley discussed a proposal for an instrument lending library by Jenn Adams from Bitterroot School of Music. Jenn is willing to lend instruments to students to encourage them to learn. She has many instruments but needs a banjo and a mandolin; if members could donate, she'd be appreciative. Jenn would manage the contracts, and funds would benefit the Bitterroot School of Music. Susan proposed that MRBA announce this program in its newsletter; she will submit an article to Kate.

Another member asked about MRBA's participation in schools. Susan responded that she had attempted to do this, with a weak reception.

Susan McCauley will continue to help run the Lone Rock kitchen in 2017. There was a shortage of donated desserts last year, and she will do an article in the newsletters to remind members to provide them.

6 Election of Officers (Mike). Getting no response from members to serve on the Board, Verna Molenda moved that the current slate of officers be renewed. Seconded and passed. The current Board remains as follows:

- President – Mike Conroy
- Vice President – Dallas Olson
- Secretary/Treasurer – Anne Merrifield

Officers and others remain as follows:

- Tari Conroy
- Phyllis Erck (Webmaster)
- Ben Essary
- Kate McMahon (Newsletter Editor)



Bluegrass Concert—Stevensville, MT Mike and Tari Conroy

Looking for music in January? The Stevensville Playhouse is hosting Mike and Tari Conroy on January 28, 2017 at 7:30. The house is already half sold out, so get your tickets early. \$12.00 adults; \$10.00 Children under 12 and seniors over 62. 406-777-2722

Instrument Lending Program

Do you have an instrument that is not being used? Would you like to see it being used?

Since part of our purpose is to encourage folks to learn and to play bluegrass music, why not donate your unused instruments to the lending library at “The Bitterroot School of Music” at Rooted Music in Hamilton? Jenn Adams has been lending instruments to students of all ages for a few years now. In this way folks can try out an instrument for a while to determine if it is right for them before purchasing one. Jenn has a contract in place that ensures the safety of the instrument while it is out.

Jenn expressed the need for a banjo and a mandolin; other instruments are welcome as well. If you have any questions or are interested in donating, you can call Susan at 360 489-7114 or Jenn at [406 363-5491](tel:4063635491).

Ellie Nuño

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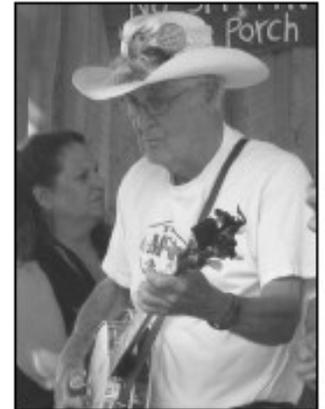
<http://thefiddleschool.com/>



Forrest Clark



Fiddlin' Jimmy Widner



Glen Stephens



Jack Winthers

Hardtimes "Pioneers"

(By Tari Conroy)

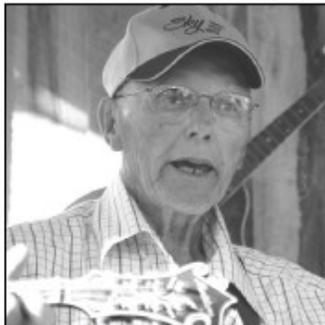
Kate asked for an article about the Bluegrass Pioneers at Hardtimes....so here goes.

Our hope for Hardtimes back in 2009 was to have a festival that was old-timey, affordable, and just plain fun for musicians and audiences alike. A lot of thought and time was spent trying to come up with things that would make it fun and entertaining for all attending.

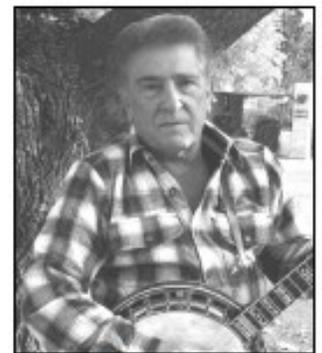


Bob Martin

Everyone knows you need bands for a festival (and we have been so blessed with friends who have bands that were willing to step up and take a chance to play for a new festival) but what else could we do that would be of interest to an audience? While thinking of bands to ask, we kept coming up with names of musicians we knew who weren't in bands anymore but were still very active in our kind of music. Many of them we had known for most our lives together, and they had been influential in our own music.



Henry Counts



Bill Neaves

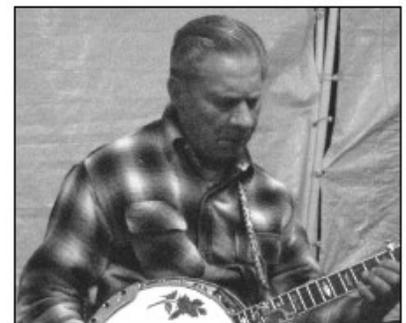
JoAnne Martin



Gary Moore



Dale Berg





Chuck & Jeanne Burruss



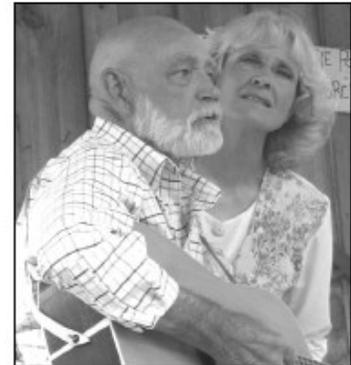
Ila Mathews, Irene Abbey & Myron Walters



Houston Rushing

We always try to involve as many people as possible with anything we've done, so why wouldn't we try to highlight some of these musicians in their own segment of the festival?

The first year was pretty easy. We had known most of those Pioneers for as long as we've been married, as Chuck & Jeanne Burrus and Jim Widner had played for our wedding. How cool would that be to have them as Pioneers? Just add Forrest Clark and Dale Berg and ...instant Pioneers! It was great to see them on stage and marvel at all the history of bluegrass music they represented! Each year we've been honored by these special folks who willingly get on that stage for us and show the audience what their unique space in this bluegrass world is. We are pretty darn proud of the Pioneers portion of the festival and what it represents. This music has been around a long time, and we truly appreciate those who have been playing it for many years. We have featured 28 Pioneers in the last eight years and apologize to those we could not find pictures of. Thanks to all!



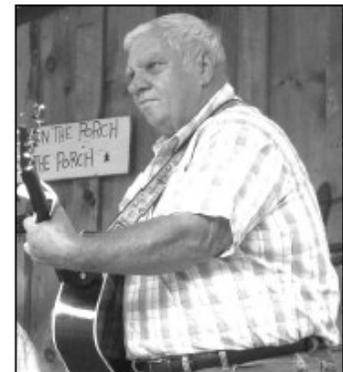
Gene & Louann Fugal



Phyllis Erck

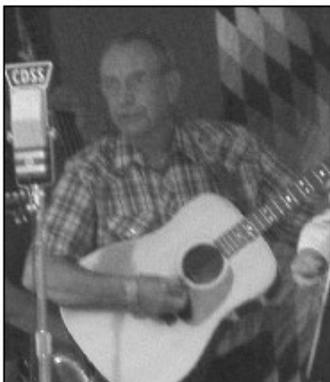
Ed Dobson

Mike & Tari



Dale Kems

Jerry Myers



Bob Greer



John Reischman and the 2016 Montana Fiddle Camp

by Mark Vosburgh

I love taking music workshop vacations. One whole blissful week of focusing on nothing but music, learning from the very best, meeting new people, and hanging out in cool locations. If this sounds like your cup of tea, you should definitely consider the Montana Fiddle Camp. It is held in June every year high in the Little Belt Mountains near Monarch, Montana. The Montana State Old Time Fiddle Association has been running the camp for over 20 years, and they know how to do it! This year's camp was sold out with a record number of over 130 attendees.



Not a fiddler? Not a problem! Camp director Fred Buckley jokes that he is considering a name change to the Montana Mandolin Camp, due to the high demand for mando instruction. Guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, cello and bass instruction is offered for all levels from beginner to advanced. The camp is well known for reasonably priced, high quality instruction and good food, at a fraction of the price many other workshops. See www.montanafiddlers.org for more details.

I went to camp last year and spent the week studying with mandolin master John Reischman. John is a Grammy-award winning artist, known for his work with his band the Jaybirds and several acclaimed solo albums. He got his start as a member of the Tony Rice Unit in the late 70's and toured with the Bay Area bluegrass band the Good Ol' Persons. Here is a report on my experience, along with some instructional tips from the master.



First of all, John is a remarkably patient instructor and all around "good guy." He genuinely loves old-time, bluegrass and fiddle music and is willing to share his advice and knowledge. John is currently scheduled to teach again the summer of 2017, along with a roster of talented instructors. We spent a good part of the workshop learning some of John's original tunes, including: Greenwood (a tune that popped into John's head while walking on Greenwood street in Seattle), Salt Spring, The North Shore, Nesser (a tune named after his daughter), and Prairie Jewel (a beautiful tune named for John's wife who grew up on the Alberta prairie). What a privilege to learn the nuances of some wonderful tunes from the master himself.

We also worked up Monroe's "Scotland" for our student performance night. Yes, part of the workshop is to perform with your student groups the last night of camp, but fear not! It's a lot of fun, and since everyone performs, you'll never find a more appreciative audience.

Speaking of performances, every night during the week the camp holds an instructor concert. These shows are simply amazing and inspiring. Premier Missoula musicians Chad Fadely, Ellie Nuno and Taylor Buckley (Fred's son), joined the likes of Reischman, Betsy Ellis (formerly of the Wilders), Craig Korth, and fiddler, singer, and stepdancer April Verch for some amazing concerts. After the concerts, everyone pulls back the chairs for a contra dance, and students are welcome to join the band. This a great opportunity for beginners to get some practice playing with others in a fun, safe setting.

John's practice tips that I gleaned while at camp

- Practice with a Metronome! John stresses the importance of good timing and reports that he simply can't play as well when the timing of others isn't rock solid.
- Make pinky strengthening exercises a priority. One devious exercise is to play fiddle tunes you already know by shifting your left hand position so that you are only using your middle, ring finger and pinky. Leave your pointer finger off the fretboard!
- Slow down and practice playing cleanly and with the best possible tone, then start speeding things up.
- Use software or an app like the Amazing Slow Downer to learn recorded fast tunes or instrumental breaks. Use the looping feature to practice, and gradually increase your speed.

- Work on playing more musically. Listen for and feel the underlying rhythmic "pulse" of a song. Focus on making the music more expressive, and pay attention to tone.

How to build solos for songs (with vocals)

- Learn the melody of a song (single note) and then build a solo by finding double stops above or below the melody.
- Stress the melody! Playing scales over chords gets old fast.
- Experiment with different chord voicing (inversions) to find the double stops that create the most interesting solo.

Chord-melody is an approach where both the chord and melody are played at the same time. It can be good practice to find or create a chord-melody to a song you are working on.

John's thoughts on Monroe-Style Mandolin

- Sling the strap over one shoulder, Monroe style. This allows you to more easily swing the mando our away from your body to prevent dampening the sound.
- Much of Monroe-style playing is built out of chords and double stops. Practice playing with different chord progressions by experimenting finding different double stops up and down the neck.
- Listen to Monroe recordings (the Amazing Slow Downer helps), and pay attention to the slides he often used.

John noted that Chris Henry (son of Murphy Method bluegrass instruction parents) has captured Monroe-style playing and has a mandolin well suited to the style.

My mini-interview on John on playing with Tony Rice

John was 22 when he joined the Tony Rice Unit 1980. He was in the Bay Area playing in the band called the Good Ol' Persons when Rice left the David Grisman Band; he was looking to form his own band and find a mandolin player. Someone brought a CD to Tony from a live recording of Reischman playing Paul's Saloon in San Francisco. Tony was impressed enough to invite John over to his house. Rice had only heard John perform in a bluegrass context; he was "ecstatic" to learn that John could play other styles including Jazz and Brazilian influenced music. "I had no idea you could play like that," Rice told Reischman, and from that point on, Rice said he was no longer looking for a mandolin player. The job was John's.

John said it wasn't an easy job because some of the music was really difficult. Also, two of John's musical heroes (David Grisman and Sam Bush) were on Tony's previous recordings. "I felt like when I was hired by Tony I really needed to step up my game," he said. The job was demanding. They had their first rehearsals in the fall of 1980, booked gigs in early winter, and went into the studio to record after the first of the year in 1981. "I practiced all the time, it was ridiculous," John said. Still the experience was positive for the young mandolin player. John said, "It was really a great opportunity, and it gave me instant credibility with other musicians, since if you play with Tony Rice, it is assumed you must be good."

John reports that in the era before clip-on tuners, Rice was a bear about playing in tune. He said "I remember once I was out of tune on stage, and in the middle of the song he started giving me a note, and he yelled out TUNE!" When I asked him what he did, John said, laughingly, "I immediately stopped and tuned!"

John enjoyed working with Tony saying, "He is great guy. He was very supportive and encouraging, and he had a great sense of humor." John continued, "I remember he didn't give much direction. As long as you played in-time and in-tune, he didn't tell you much what to play." John has been unsuccessful lining up more sessions playing with Tony in recent years. John said, "I really wanted to play music with him again when I wasn't as intimidated and was more confident in my own playing style."

John's current band, the Jaybirds, was formed from the core group of players who were on his classic *Up in the Woods* recording in 1999. All five current members have been with the band since 2000, although all members have other endeavors and projects. John has recently completed a long-term project of releasing transcriptions of his *Up in the Woods* CD, an endeavor anxiously awaited by his mandolin playing fans.



John on singing and harmony singing

While primarily an instrumentalist, John does do some singing with the Jaybirds. He mainly has the role of singing the baritone part (the part just below the lead). I asked him how it came about that he started singing and how he learned to sing harmony. He said he never really felt the desire or need to sing, but in a band setting, harmony is an important part of the music. John's brother (he describes him as an outgoing Type A personality) is a good lead singer in a band, so John figured he could learn if had to.

One of John's early band partners recorded himself singing the baritone part to songs, and John just learned to sing the part "by rote." After doing that for a while he found that, with time and effort, he could always find the third harmony part in songs. He reports that he finds it easier to sing baritone to a woman vocalists lead because it is easier to hear the lower vocal range.

John on his Loar

John's Lloyd Loar Gibson is widely regarded as one of the best sounding instruments on the planet. He describes his mandolin as "atypical to other Loars," more mellow, smoother, and darker tone with fewer mid-range tones. The instruments were made from 1922 to 1924, and many are good. John's came from an exceptional batch including a great instrument owned by David Grisman and two owned by Chris Thile. His is dated February 18th, 1924. John has had his fingerboard replaced with a radius board, and he uses a full contact bridge that has corrected a small distortion in the top that was occurring. Remarkably, John generously let all of the student in the class play his Loar. I can attest that it is an amazing sounding mandolin.

If you are looking for a fun music workshop, I would highly recommend the Montana Fiddle Camp. I'll follow up this article with a report of my experience at the Chris Henry Monroe-Style Mandolin Camp in Winchester, Virginia, September 2016. It was a good one!

Mark

Below are links if you want to watch some videos of John:

Salt Spring

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtEFXm7eobg>



More—MRBA Holiday Party Photos



Tari and Arlene pickin' on their guitars

Going through the chow line





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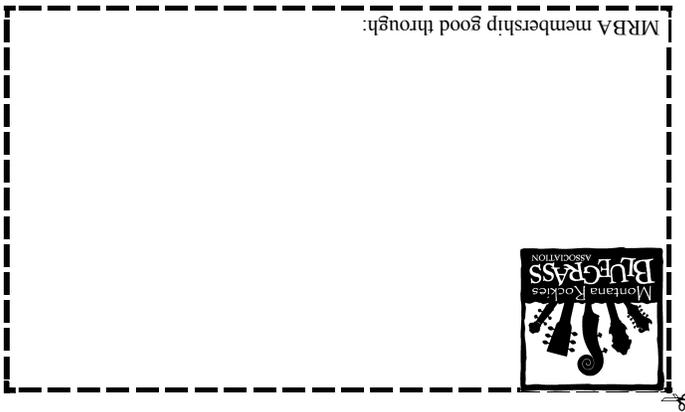
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