
Notes

Concepts of Nostalgia, Legacy, Mentorship and Innovation in (Appalachian) Old-Time Music

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Introduction

These research notes act as a companion piece [the third in a series¹⁾] to a documentary film currently in production²⁾. That film, funded in part by a research grant from the College of Economics³⁾, traces the origins of old-time music (OTM) from its roots in Ulster Province Ireland, through slaves and freed African Americans, to living musicians in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The text that follows is a collection of interview excerpts recorded in and around the Appalachian region⁴⁾ during research trips in the spring of 2020 and the summer of 2019. These materials will be interlaced with questions and commentary from the author.

1) 『経済研究』12号 & 『経済研究』13号 The first installment was released in *Keizai Kenkyu Vol. 12*, published by the College of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University in 2020. The second installment was released in *Keizai Kenkyu Vol. 13*, published by the College of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University in 2021.

2) To be released in the future (delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.)

3) Incredible thanks are due to the Institute of Economic Research at Aoyama Gakuin University for their kind and generous support of this research.

4) Primarily Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, USA.



1.

Chris Coole: “As a city person, just seeing this rural life depicted in a TV show from the 60’s, it pulled me into the “world” around the music and the culture that surrounded it.”

CC: I’m Chris Coole and I’m from Toronto (Ontario, Canada.) I definitely don’t have any country music in my family. I’ve basically lived in downtown Toronto (a fairly large city) my whole life. I started playing guitar when I was about 13. My high school offered a guitar class. If I think back, I’ve always loved the banjo, too. The first album I ever remember hearing a banjo on was the *Jazz Singer* by Neil Diamond. There’s this one tune called the Robert E. Lee and I remember, as a kid, just playing that over and over (it’s tenor banjo). Saying that doesn’t give me much “street cred.” in the OT world [*laughs.*] But that’s what I remember. We went on a family trip to Nashville and I started hearing country music. I picked up a Little Roy Lewis album—a whacky album, but great banjo playing. This was in the late 80’s, and before you could type “banjo” in a search engine, so it really was mysterious. But another thing that got me into it was, when I was around 12, I got obsessed with the *Andy Griffith Show*⁵⁾. The re-runs were on every day when I came home for lunch. I got so obsessed with it—to the point where I had all 249 episodes on VHS tape and I started the Toronto chapter of the Andy Griffith Fan Club. I was so into it. The Dillards, a BG band from the 60’s were on there and also the Kentucky

5) “The Andy Griffith Show” aired on US broadcaster CBS from October 1960, to April 1968. It has had popularity in syndication as well.

Colonels (Clarence White and Roland White), so they would make appearances as these sort of Hillbilly families from the mountains that would come and play music, and that's when I realized what it looked like: "That's a guy playing a banjo or dobro," and stuff like that. So much of it (especially for an "outsider" like me, is that it's not just the music, but the culture surrounding the music and the stories surrounding the music are also really attractive as well. Granted, it was a TV show and it was Pop Culture, but it was really charming to me, especially I guess, as a city person, just seeing this rural life depicted in a TV show from the 60's, it pulled me into the "world" around the music and the culture that surrounded it.

CC: I got my first banjo when I was 17. I got it for Christmas. Even if you're into music, when you start playing an instrument you begin to listen to it in such a completely different level. Every Friday night, me and my buddy Pat, would go around to used record stores in town and search through the bins and I was a young, late 80's hippie kid, into the Grateful Dead, and I found the "Old & In the Way" album with Jerry Garcia plays banjo, David Grisman Vassar Clements and Peter Rowan (I can't remember the bass player at this moment—poor bass players) it's got this really cool cartoon album cover. That might have been the first BG album I got really into. And then it was like a puzzle—you'd go and: "What's this?" "A 'County Clawhammer' album!" or a Doc Watson album and you'd piece it together. It was in some ways harder but I actually wouldn't trade it for the way people learn today. I actually think there's too much now. There's too much information and the curation that's involved in sifting through it all—I wouldn't want to have had to do that. Whereas the way I came into it, I think I played banjo for a couple of years before I actually saw anyone playing OTM. There wasn't a lot around at that time. But because of the randomness of "What did you happen to find?" at a record store in Toronto, Canada, that related to this. The way into it often involved weird albums because there was no one saying what you "had to" listen to. For example "Trapezoid" (1975 Paul Reisler and Sam Rizzetta) they did hammer dulcimer stuff—not what you would call a definitive OT album, but because it was what I found, it was actually really important to me hearing it.

MM: So mostly you learned by ear from albums?

CC: Yeah, and I started learning BG banjo. I did that for about a year. And I

heard Doc Watson—my teacher would make me tapes. And I heard “Shady Grove” and I remember calling him up and I asked him “What is this?” it didn’t sound like the same thing. My teacher said he was playing claw hammer [banjo.] I found a teacher by the name of Rick Fielding, who was a life-long, working-musician, folk-guy (“bar/folk musician”) who could play in all kinds of styles and many different instruments. He showed me just basic frailing (like in the Pete Seeger school.) From there I sort of went off on my own.

MM: In heard you used to busk in the past?

CC: There’s definitely a tradition of busking if you look back. In high school I would busk on the streets of Toronto on the weekends. I had been in rock bands, but I never made money doing it. With busking I could make 40 or 50 dollars a day.

After HS, I really didn’t have a plan, but I was obsessed with music. And I thought about it and decided that I would busk for a year. So I got a license to do it in the subways (you did a little audition), and this was about ’91, ’92 and I was making pretty good money. I was still living at my parents’ house and I just sort of never looked back. I did that for about 11 years. It was like my day job. Most musicians have to have a day job. My day job all throughout my 20’s was busking. I treated it like a job. I would get up most mornings at like 06:30 and be in the subways playing around 07:00 and play for however long it took me to make the money I felt I needed.

MM: What was the repertoire?

CC: When I first started I was playing banjo. I would sometimes sit and play “Soldier’s Joy” straight for 45 minutes without stopping. So I learned to improvise, sort of: I learned how to play endless variations cause I had the luxury of sitting there playing over and over again with an audience! But not an audience that stood there and watched the whole thing. Busking is a great way to get over stage fright (I’m a shy person), it’s a sort of in between—not an attentive audience, but you’re not alone (like you would be practicing at the house where there is no exchange of energy between the performer and the audience.)

And it’s not as intense as being on stage and doing a show. I didn’t think about it at the time, but as I look back, I think that really helped me become comfortable playing in front of others.

MM: When did you start writing original music?

CC: The first song I wrote, I was about seven years old, it was about Wayne Gretsky. I've always been a writer. I don't think everyone needs to do it. A lot of OT players say we have enough songs and I get it, but, for me, I need to write.

I do most of my tune writing on the banjo. For a long time I exclusively wrote lyrics on guitar. The first song (with lyrics) that I wrote on the banjo is called "Old Dog" that I wrote about ten years ago.

CC: The OT scene in Canada has grown a lot. When I first started, there was a guy named Arnie Naiman and his wife Kathy when I was about 18, they were sort of like the only ones doing OTM. He was a huge influence in my playing and a real mentor and a friend and we later recorded albums together. Over the years, it's built up. I think the internet has helped in this development. Especially folks outside big cities. Now, there's a scene—a big convoy that goes down to Clifftop, for instance.



2.

Cary Fridley: But in the vocals, what's interesting is just the resonance with the natural surroundings... It's poor people's music. It's all by ear, by rote. It's community music.

CF: I'm originally from Covington, VA and right now I'm in Asheville, NC

MM: How did you get started in OTM?

CF: Growing up in Covington, VA—it's in the mountains near WV, there's a lot of BG players come out of there. Where I lived, there wasn't too much

distinction between BG and OTM, but there was probably more BG (they had evolved with the times.) My dad knew I was interested in music, so he hooked me up with a Jam (old-timers) I was like 14. They showed me the ropes. I was interested in history, so I started asking how old the songs were. I asked around, but no one knew. So I tried to research the oldest ones and I kept coming back to the Carter Family and the Stanley Brothers and the Monroe Brothers.

I went to Augusta Heritage Center to go to Dance Week with my aunt who was into square dancing. I took a class in OT singing and Carter Family songs. I met some folks and became friends (we are all close friends now in Asheville.)

MM: How about before that?

CF: I was too shy, and I was playing the banjo. And at that jam, they forced me to sing. I had sung in the church choir, but never by myself. They forced me to sing “Boil them Cabbage Down” and I realized how hard it was. And then I started to practice. I got my driver’s license and I could practice in the car with my cassettes. I liked the chord changes and the energy and I liked to dance.

MM: Were you harmonizing?

CF: I learned from singing in the choir (alto), I could find low harmony to the high melody line. I started listening carefully to the Carter Family and I like how they sing the harmony—it’s well thought out.

MM: What’s your repertoire?

CF: I really love Carol Elizabeth Jones (her voice sits in the same place as mine), and Hazel and Alice and I got to meet and talk to these people.

I like the old-timey ballad singers (special to Asheville, NC.) There’s a vibrant family tradition (since the 1700’s.)

CF: I have a loud, full voice (it’s either on or off) to “ring the hills” It’s easier for me to do those types of songs. I love the oldest recordings of the ballad singer—before electricity, when they were really filling the space with their voices.

MM: [I ask her to sing.]

CF: If I crash and burn I might want another chance at it. (laughs) I’m going to try “Silk Merchant’s Daughter” and I believe it’s from Dellie Norton from Sodom Laurel, NC (Madison Co.) one county over.

(Sings.)

CF: It’s a simple sentiment. And something that anyone can relate to. I do

afterschool classes with young kids (Junior Appalachian Musicians, or “JAM”.)

A lot of ballads are about terrible topics, but this one—anyone can understand it: How your brother doesn’t like your boyfriend and is trying to bribe you away. And how important it is to be true to your heart, and it works out in the end. The performance and the melody both struck me.

MM: What about the ballad format—with no musical accompaniment?

CF: They’re kind of free rhythmically—like “conversational.” More “ride the breath” than count to four. With just one person, you can slow down or speed up and it doesn’t matter. And when you’re singing, it’s more like a phrase; as if you were speaking in a conversation. With one breath you have hold a note and finish it before you run out of breath, so it’s more natural, I think. You can’t tap your foot to it.

MM: In what context would they be sung?

CF: I used to have romantic ideas about: everyone is sitting in a circle, with snow falling outside. A photographer Rob Amberg did a book on Dellie Norton (so I asked him to do the photos for my album.) And he told me that he asked Dellie Norton: “What’s going through your mind when you sing?” and she said: “Well, I’m out in the garden, I hoe and I sing and I hoe and I sing, so they’re kind of just like work songs—to help you pass the time, to help you shuck corn all day.

MM: No church?

CF: No. There’s two types of songs: church songs and love songs. These are love songs. And some Baptists that don’t believe in singing love songs at all.

MM: I ask her about another type of song.

CF: There’s one from Pocahontas Co, WV (a couple counties away from where I grew up)

It’s where the Hammons Family was documented and recorded (a great album)

CF: It’s called: “Young Henerly” [Sings.]

CF: She throws her into a well next, so that’s probably a good place to stop.

MM: What misconceptions do people have about this music?

CF: One thing is it’s kind of simple and that it’s kid’s music or not very sophisticated and that’s why they only used one chord, I believe it’s a conscience decision for a purity of sound and not having things fly out of control. Like a

well-oiled machine, like a perfect little machine. It's structured with parameters and beautiful because of that.

MM: [I ask about various influences.]

CF: Most of the Native American influence you can see in the dance, with the weight going down (differs from UK dancing.) But in the vocals, what's interesting is just the resonance with the natural surroundings. To ring the hills and to use acoustic instruments and fitting in with natural surroundings. The singing of opening your throat, being FULL. And more of a natural singing style. Not an affected tone, more of a natural tone. But in the Native Indian tradition, they didn't use harmonies, they always sang in unison. I think that's interesting. Now, they've incorporated harmonies in modern powwows.

CF: Remember: it's poor people's music. It's all by ear, by rote. It's community music.

I have my great grandmother's autograph book from Roanoke, VA. in 1884 when she was six years old. And these children had all written in beautiful handwriting these wonderful poems which they had memorized. And I thought: "everyone knew poems!" and I imagine they all sang little songs and I recognized that some of the kid's poems were from OT lyrics. I imagine that, before electricity people were singing to each other and making each other laugh and, if you could play an instrument you were putting on a dance and if not, you were dancing.



3.

Chester McMillan: You have to have a good ear to listen to fiddle and banjo. You put [guitar runs] in to drive the next verse...

CM: My name is Chester McMillan, in live in Mt. Airy NC, in the Round Peak section of Surry Co. I play old-time “gittar” a little different style then a lot of people. More like to back people up, mostly. I’m not a fancy guitar player—I just sort of do my thing to help everyone else out. I’ve been playing since I was about 8 or 9 years old.

My dad played OT banjo. And uncles and them played fiddle. When I was a little kid, we’d go to my step-grandad’s house and they’d take all the furniture out of the living room and we’d have a square dance. I remember my daddy and another guy would sit in the corner and play, and they’d dance out here. I was just a kid & I’d sit somewhere and listen.

CM: Later on I married into Dick Freeman’s family (an OT banjo he learned from Charlie Lowe—who I consider a master of OT banjo. They say: Kyle Creed and Fred Cochran they learned to play banjo from him.

Where I live at—at the old Freeman home place—that’s the first place Tommy Jarrell played square dances—at the old Freeman house. And they would put the furniture out and they’d dance in this room [he gestures] and the musicians would be in the hall.

I own that home place now. There’s always music played in that house. We had square dances from the late 60’s and 70’s. Time goes by so fast you can’t keep up with it!

I travelled and played with Tommy Jarrell for years. I think we played four folk festivals. Different places.

MM: What would you call your style?

CM: It's "Chester Style." Nobody else plays that style!

My style like that right there you see? [Holds out the picks on his right hand.] Ain't nobody does that. Your friend [Shohei⁶⁾], he's been filming me now for 2 years. He might get it one of these days—it takes a lot of practice you know.

But as far as I know I'm the only one that plays this style. It works in OT and BG.

MM: Who taught you?

CM: I taught myself. I was holding the pick this way [shows] I played Merle Travis style pickin.' I played with the Shady Mountain Ramblers in Galax back in 1980 and I did mechanic work and I smashed my finger. And I got up to play but it was too painful so I turned the pick around like this and it made somethin' new. [smiles] Because I play rhythm all the time with this. [**the thumb pick is normal position, & he picks down with thumb and kind of brushes the melody strings with the reversed middle finger pick [Index finger pick is standard position.]*]

I was playing with Tommy about the same time I was playing with the Pine Ridge Boys and Patsy and then I played with the Shady Mountain Ramblers out of Galax.

And then in 1986, we started a family band called Back Step. We had Greg Hoover on the fiddle and my son on mandolin, Margaret Cochran on the bass, and Ray Chatfield on the banjo (but there was a falling out) so we had Kirk Sutphin playing with us. We had that band up to '91 or '92 and then me and then me and my son played gospel music with the Moose Family out of Low Gap for about 2 or 3 years and then we got back to Back Step.

Around 2000, we started a band with Kenny Bryant and his girlfriend and we made a CD: "Rise and Bloom Again" so, we played 'til 2012. They separated and then Buck played bass with us and Michael Motley played banjo, so we started Backstep up again. But they started playing country music and went to

6) Interviewed in *Keizai Kenkyu Vol. 13*, published by the College of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University in 2021.

Nashville. So I started playing with the Zeph'r Lightning Bolts out of Elkin. I just filled in. I didn't know it's last over 5 years, but it did. I stopped played with them back in February. My wife was real bad sick. Almost 8 months. She passed away last Tuesday.

I had a pretty good life playing music. I teach a lot of music. I work through the JAM Program. I teach at Chester Creek (Chestnut Creek) and Galax. I go several places to teach this style of guitar. I play a good backup with just straight pick also. I go to Port Townsend WA. I usually have a lot of students.

I'm getting 76 years old and I live on a small farm and it keeps you busy. I have a peach orchard so I pick peaches. I also do the "Back Packing"—a Program for kids who don't have enough food at home. We give a bag of food—enough food for the weekend. And I start my 10th year now doing that. And I play at church every Sunday.

MM: I ask about his runs.

CM: I do a bunch of runs. You can't just put it in! You have to have a good ear to listen to fiddle and banjo. You put it in to drive the next verse, like that (he swings his arm a bit)

You can play straight guitar with it, but after a while it sort of gets dragging but if you keep pushing them along. But it works real good. You can walk it down. You got to wait. When the fiddle hits a high note and the banjo hits a thumb string, when you're playing in G, you go [shows] 'cause that's their thumb string and the high note that the fiddle makes. You highlight the tonic string (D string for D, G string for G) The string of the chord you're gonna go back into.



4.

Oscar Hall: My mother played the claw hammer banjer and my daddy blowed the harmonica we always had music in our family since I can remember.

OH: I'm Oscar Hall, from Galax VA, live over on Ballard and Branch.

I've been connected to the Old Fiddler's Convention for 53 years. 90 years old, still 'er trucking. (laughs) That's the sound men testing something down there.

MM: How did you get started?

OH: I grewed up in it. I used to work at Carnation Milk Company (closed now) but I went to work for them in 1944. In 1965 I got to be connected to the Moose Lodge. I got to be governor and changed a lot. We got the grandstand built and put the roof on it. It should be called Moose Park! (They've done so much for it.) Peaked out in 2000 or so. My uncle played music. My mother played the claw hammer banjer and my daddy blowed the harmonica we always had music in our family since I can remember.

OH: Got out of the military in 1947 "As I sat here on the valley I can see your mansion on the hill." Progressive is not traditional to me.

OH: Both of my sons are old time musicians. (One drives a bus for a famous BG band. Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver.)

MM: Can you talk about the popular green pick-up truck?

OH: I bought it one time, the boys brought it to the Artic watershed in Alaska.

It really likes gas—it don't sip gas, it drinks it. I bought it off the government "The Old Green Truck" Ballard's Branch (his wife's family) New Ballard's

Branch Bogtrotters

The truck has been there 40 years! I'm 90 and you've been blessed if you get that old.

OH: My wife did the secretary work for 18 years "with a pencil" and it was a lot bigger then than it is now. When the computers came out, she gave up. She did it with legal pads (One for each category.) She passed 3 years ago. Fred Patton was her uncle – a claw hammer banjo player. My uncle was Harold Hall (Banjo) My youngest boy plays the mandolin and Dennis plays the guitar. There were 2400 entrants in the 80's and 90's but it's down to about 1200 now.

MM: What are the categories?

OH: 1) Old-time fiddle and 2) Blue-grass fiddle; 3) Old-time banjer and 4) BG banjer; 5) Autoharp; 6) dulcimer; 7) mandolin; 8) dobro; 9) folk song; 10) dance 11 guitar and 12) band

MM: What are the judges looking for in a performer?

OH: How good they play the tune and don't miss no notes.

MM: How is Galax as a community?

OH: Industry went away but it's coming back (lumber industry) most goes overseas. Its' a nice place to live.

MM: How did you live so long?

OH: I eat what I want to—and take my medicine. I never was afraid to work.

OH: If you got a Blue Ribbon at Galax Fiddler's Convention you is the champion. You got to be good to get a blue ribbon here.

MM: Is there anything else people should know?

OH: They need to come up here and enjoy theirself and listen the fiddle. It's the oldest and the largest in the world.

MM: What are the future plans?

OH: Just keep it going as long as we can.



5.

Riley Baugus: ... many times the people didn't leave the region, so they played the same small set of tunes, which might be 50 or 60 tunes. An entire community might play those over the course of a century, you know?

My name is Riley Baugus and I'm from Walkertown, NC. Forsyth Co. Family is from Alleghany Co. Foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

As a young man, I was always fascinated by the way people reacted to people who play music. And I needed some kind of affirmation-- something that said to me that people would accept me. And I loved the sound of music-- the different styles of OTM. I liked folk-related music: BG, Blues, Country. It fascinated me that you could make sounds and people reacted. You could control peoples' emotions by the sounds you made. It's a cool thing.

I started with fiddle-- but then at 10 I got a guitar out of a Sears Roebuck catalog. Then my dad and I made a banjo out of scrap wood.

RB: I was taking violin at school, but as a kid of Southern Appalachian heritage I had no concept of what classical music was. I thought they were going to teach me to fiddle and I soon discovered that Dvorak's Slavonic Dances is not what I signed on for.

They didn't really teach me to play fiddle, but I did learn a lot about the mechanics of music, which has helped me over the years. But I started to teach myself banjo and guitar.

RB: And as a teenager, my best friend was Kirk Sutphin⁷⁾ (one of the best OT fiddlers).

We started going up to Tommy Jarrell's house about 30 min away. Kirk's grandfather had known Tommy and told Kirk to go there.

Being his pal, we started going together. So I started listening to the Round Peak music.

Gettin' to be friends with Tommy meant that you got to be friends all the other musicians in the community. And then going to fiddler's conventions, that community gets bigger because you have people coming from NY and Pennsylvania and out west. It was a big awakening and it was a really good time.

MM: What were some early tunes?

RB: Oh yeah. "What you gonna do with the baby-o" "Fall on my knees" "Sally Ann" "Susan Anna Gal" things like "Old Joe Clark" "Casey Jones" "John Brown's Dream" "Breaking Up Christmas" The standard repertoire for the Round Peak area.

And then we had fiddlers like Robert Sykes, who played an entirely different set of tunes, but was still part of that scene. (He'd make up a tune every now and then, too.) He has a tune a lot of people play called "Robert's Serenade" and he's famous for playing a version of "Black Eyed Susan" in the key of A. (Usually played in D.) It's pretty different.

MM: How do you characterize your musical style?

RB: It's called Round Peak. It comes from the Round Peak area in Surrey Co., NC. That's the base of what I do. But I've adopted a lot of techniques that aren't traditional RP. But RP is my favorite to play.

MM: What are the features of RP?

RB: RP is a driving style of music that was primarily meant for dancing. It's a bit more melodic than some of the styles, but it's not melodic. (like Ken Pearlman's style of banjo playing). We have a bit more melody than those folks

7) Interviewed in *Keizai Kenkyu Vol. 13*, published by the College of Economics, Aoyama Gakuin University in 2021.

in SW Virginia might play because theirs' is a more rhythmic style. In RP, we incorporate rhythm and melody a great deal of melody and rhythm into the banjo and fiddle. It has a rocking bow style on the fiddle.

It's a set of tunes that are common to the area. That started coming into the area in the late 1800's.

MM: From where?

RB: From everywhere. People would go out and work in Work Camps. They'd leave and go work in Punching Camps (a lumber camp) or they'd work in the Coal Fields. When you had migrants meeting in these places, they would learn tunes from each other. They would take tunes from their area and trade them for tunes from another area and bring them back-- that was a common practice. There was no recording-- people didn't have access to records in the early days. The records didn't become prominent until the late 1920's or 30's, when you could afford a record player and then had extra money to buy records.

That was a luxury. You barely had enough money to eat a lot of times, so you didn't spend it on records.

MM: Do you see any differences between OTM musicians today?

RB: Nowadays, people have more of a generic style -- not meant to be derogatory-- it's just that in the old days OTM was played in specific regions. And many times the people didn't leave the region, so they played the same small set of tunes, which might be 50 or 60 tunes. An entire community might play those over the course of a century, you know? Whereas now, people have the ability listen to recordings, there's YouTube, there are people giving lessons in OTM you travel to fiddler's conventions all over where everybody from every walk of life and every community throughout the country, and world come together to play Southern Appalachian or Midwestern OTM, you know?

It's just a very different time, you know?

RB: There's an exchange of information now that people didn't have 75 years ago.

Yeah, so, stylistically, things are different. And, well and thinking about it though, when you go to different regions of the country, even the people who

have taken up OTM as something that is not within their specific culture, there are still “Regional Styles” you know: people get a Tune Set in that area and that's what they play. But then you go to the fiddler's conventions and you learn more tunes. It's sort of the same kind of thing happening, but on a much larger scale.

MM: How important is music in your community now?

RB: There are a lot of young musicians taking up OTM in the area-- probably the same number of musicians (maybe a few more.) They still have dances on Saturday nights. There's always somewhere you can go in the foothills of NC and SW VA or up in the Blue Ridge. There's somewhere you can go on Saturday night to a traditional square dance.

RB: Most OT musicians have day jobs. I do not other than building 5-string banjos. I was very fortunate a few years ago to have the opportunity on the soundtrack for the film Cold Mountain. I was a welder and blacksmith for 18 years leading up to that and then was able to leave the welding shop and pursue music full time.

RB: I'll play you “Sally Ann.” They call this the national anthem of Surry Co. and the national anthem of RP-- you would rarely go into a session and not play this. I probably base my version on Tommy Jarrell's. But then hearing recordings of Fred Cochran (a cousin of TJ) I sort of adopted some of his licks and of course there's a lot of Riley Baugus in there too.) Cause I CAN'T play like those old folks-- cause I can only play like me. (But I am influenced by their way of playing.

MM: Can I ask you about tunes with problematic (racist) titles that are in the OTM repertoire?

RB: I think some are good tunes despite the derogatory titles, and they were products of their time and titles are simply titles. They called them that because it was socially acceptable to call them that at the time (amongst the whites that were playing it-- certainly not in the black community.) I don't think the tunes should be erased because of a racist title cause we don't know if those were the original titles. They might have learned the tune from someone else under a different title and then it became known as something else.

RB: I believe that all people are equal. And that we all have our place in the world and that we should all be treated exactly the same. There's no difference in humans based on color, sexual orientation or creed in my mind. But I don't think those tunes should be erased because of some people who were cruel.

MM: Are those tunes still being played?

RB: Sure. You certainly eliminate the offensive terms in the name and of course some people snicker in the background. That's on them. That's not the way I feel about it. I'm going to take the tune and play the tune and not have it be associated with any of that. The melodies have nothing at all to do with the derogatory titles, so the melodies don't say anything about what the title is.

RB: Of course there are people who still think that way (in a racist tone) and that's always going to be-- I don't think you will ever erase that. But everybody doesn't feel like that.

It's a hard subject to broach, but it's something that has to be dealt with. I'm certainly not going to be offensive to someone based on their color. It has no place in modern society as far as I'm concerned.

RB: I'm a pretty liberal moderate these days. When you travel. I travel a lot-- being raised in the area I was raised, you're subjected to the politics and the thinking of the people around you. Racism is not a trait you are born with. Racism is something you learn.

Travelling around the world-- you see the world in a whole different way-- IF you are open-minded to it. (Some people don't change), I try and learn everywhere I go.

RB: I never understood why you should be mean to somebody because their skin color was different. I never understood that as a child. You're told things like: "You can be friends with them, but don't ever bring one home." It's still in the South in many ways, it's still a hard thing. But I think and hope that we've made huge strides making a change believing that all people really are equal.

MM: Lastly, what's the difference between Blue Grass and OTM?

RB: A lot of people think that OTM is BG played badly. And if we could actually play music, that we would stop playing OT and start playing BG. The

reason I play OTM is because OTM is good. If I wanted to play BG, I WOULD-- it's not a matter of COULD, it's a matter of WOULD. And I do enjoy BG. Tunes like "Old Joe Clark" or "Cripple Creek" connect both disciplines.



6. and 7a.

Deborah Sherrill and Erynn Marshall [pictured above left]: "Helen [pictured above right], started this with two goals in mind: 1) To keep this tradition of our culture going and, secondly, 2) To give the kids in this organization a real place to belong."

EM⁸⁾: [with Deborah Sherrill] Welcome to the Alleghany JAM (Junior Appalachian Musicians). We're here in Sparta, NC, at the Alleghany JAM House, which used to be the senator's house, beautiful. We're in front of this amazing mural, made by Jose Milchez, there is a silhouette of Helen White, the founder of the JAM Program (she passed away in 2019, but she is commemorated in this mural.) And Deborah Sherrill Chair of the JAM Board, tell us more about the program.

DS: We're the original JAM—All. Is where it all began. And it's been in existence for 20 years. Since then "Regional JAM" was founded, which is an umbrella of all the other JAMs. It now is in 5 states. Even though Helen left us early, her legacy lives on in these JAMs and the lives of the children who she has impacted.

MM: Could you explain what the Program is?

8) Erynn Marshall

DS: Sure. It's an organization that was started to make sure the OTM of our area, our heritage, doesn't die out. Originally, the kids around here, looked down on the music as "hillbilly music," none of them wanted to be a part of it, as if it was uncool. And so, Helen started this with two goals in mind: 1) To keep this tradition of our culture going and, secondly, 2) To give the kids in this organization a real place to belong. Helen worked in the school as a counselor and she noticed there was a lot of emphasis on athletics and that kids in sports had a peer group, but if you're not an athlete, there were a lot of kids that were falling through the cracks. There are some real good role models with the great staff that we have. They form bonds with the kids & the kids with each other. So, that's how it began.

EM: Alleghany JAM refers to Junior Appalachian Musicians. And we "JAM" a lot—in informal musical get-togethers. It's celebrating the traditional music and culture from this area and, broader, the Appalachian traditions beyond the Blue Ridge as well.

MM: What instruments are taught here?

EM: Fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, dulcimer traditional dance, bass, and singing!

EM: They're learning traditional clogging. People here learn to step dance in one form or another: flatfoot or clogging (sometimes called buck dancing) They do that from a very young age: 5 and up I'd say. Here's one of our classes.

EM: We were able to work up a down payment for this house by generous donors.

EM: Here's our singing class with Ms. Emily Spencer. She has family in the White Top Mountain Band, she's wonderful.

It's made such a difference in our Program- we've been able to add classes for adults.

Ukulele and dulcimer, etc. We have people from 8 years old to 85 years playing.

EM: When I go to schools in Sparta, NC or Galax, V., I ask kids if they have musicians in their families and lots of hands go up. So it's really inspiring to be in this area. JAM allows the kids to come and be proud of their heritage. Sometimes you don't realize how special music is because you've grown up

with it. But we let them know that this is one of the things that this area is famous for.

EM: We get a lot of donated instruments.

EM: It's usually just a few dollars per class. The students do 24 2-hour classes. In the summer we do Alleghany JAM camp. This leads to the local fiddle festival.

Gavin: If it wasn't for JAM, I probably wouldn't have been able to find my talent to share. It was my papa's idea—it was hard work, it hurt my fingers. I'm getting over stage fright. You may have a talent that you don't know about, so kids can find out by joining the JAM Program.



7b.

Erynn Marshall: When I play a fiddle tune, it's like telling a story. Hopefully I convey that. Some are expressions of joy or great laments that are sorrowful or wistful.

EM: I'm Erynn Marshall I live in Galax, VA originally from Victoria, BC.

MM: Early musical memory?

EM: Always lots of music. Dad was a musician and many on mother's side were also musicians. One strong memory was seeing my uncle's stand-up bass (around 5) There were a lot of fiddlers in my family. My great-grandparents played the fiddle (I never got to hear them.) Dad played guitar.

MM: What style?

EM: Not Southern OTM, but Irish.

MM: When did you start?

EM: I had started asking for a fiddle at 5—no one knows why. Finally got one 8. In school, there taught classical. As a teen, I was trying out different style (Irish for a while), I worked at an instrument shop and played a little banjo. That exposed me to Southern Fiddle music.

I thought: Why are all the songs about murder ballads and train wrecks? It was beautiful. I had never heard anything like it. There were crooked tunes, tunes with extra beats. Unusual tunings and a “bluesiness” that I was attracted to which was the African American influence. Scotts-Irish, English, Germanic. Very interesting mix of fiddle styles. Big melting pot when the settlers came over mixing with plantation slaves.

MM: Can you think of a tune?

EM: I was listening to field recordings and it was really hard to find stuff—it wasn’t like now. I always liked Ward Jarvis’ “Icey Mountain” it’s in this tuning [she bows the strings]

MM: On a personal level, can you describe why/ how fiddle music is important to you?

EM: It’s a complete way of life—a community of people. I spent a lot of time visiting old fiddlers in WV and KY and learning about their lives and traditions. They were so welcoming to me. It was so enriching to me as a person. And there are the relationships with the musicians. I love teaching children and adults. We do at least 10 camps a year.

It’s almost a spiritual pursuit.

EM: There’s something that’s so much more than what appears to be a simple tune. On an energy level, on everything. It’s very important. It’s totally encompassing.

MM: When you play, what do you focus on with the fiddle?

EM: I want to bring the feeling out of the instrument. It’s like a singer who sings—they become the song. When I play a fiddle tune, it’s like telling a story. Hopefully I convey that. Some are expressions of joy or great laments that are sorrowful or wistful. I’m thinking about conveying the emotion behind the tune.

EM: They have real places, people and experiences tied up in the tune for me. I’ve learned from a lot of fiddlers and I think of some of those older fiddlers I spent time learning the tunes and I think of them or I remember the way that the

house smelled or the wood smoke—just the whole experience. I would often spend a whole day with people learning tunes.

EM: People like: Melvin Wine and Lester McCumbers and Leland Hall Woody Simmons in WV but also with Clyde Davenport and Art Stanford and others Benton Flippen in NC. I was really into the old-timers. Nowadays a lot of fiddlers who inspire me are closer to my own age or even younger.

MM: Could you share a tune (or part of a tune) with us?

EM: A lot of tunes demonstrate history. Melvin Wine is from Copan WV and I spent a lot of visiting during the last 5 years of his life. He was a well of 100's of tunes and often the only one who knew some. Many harkened back to the Civil War or the Revolutionary War. He had learned from his father and his mother was a wonderful ballad singer and his grandfather was a whistler and his great-grandfather was a fiddler. So some of these tunes were really old. One he used to play was, (he didn't really have a name for it.) [plays]

EM: That is a really old piece—that kind of “free” time and I'd just be alone sitting in the house with Melvin and he'd play a piece like that—and he only knew one line of it and it was: “We drove them 9 miles and we stacked them up in piles, besides what we drowneded (sic) in the river”

EM: So talk about dark and spooky! So those old pieces-- a lot of them you don't hear anymore. And so, those were powerful experiences for me. And that melody is so sad.

It's too old to know the full history on it, but the person who wrote that melody was there. You can just tell. It's so sincere. It's so painful. That's a very powerful experience. The context behind it.

MM: What would be helpful for people to know about OTM that would help them understand it (vs., say BG or country music?)

EM: Many think OTM is just all knee slapping “Yee Haa!” dance music and it's not. There's a whole range—dance music is a big part. There are solo pieces and tunes that are meant to be listened to and enjoyed.

Another misconception is that women in the past weren't interested in the fiddle or didn't play. From what I can tell, actually there were a lot of women who played. Yes, more of them played piano or more of them sang (because that was more “appropriate.” In the church, the fiddle was associated with

dancing and possibly drinking. So it wasn't always seen as seemly for a woman to play the fiddle, but many still did. But they didn't necessarily play it in the same places that men did. They were playing in the home or at church. They weren't competing so much. Often people would notice the lack of women at fiddle contests. There's tons of women now!

Sylvie O'Brien was a great banjo player from WV, (she's been gone a long time) and, she competed but her brother Jennis Carvel didn't like it. He didn't like it when she beat him in the banjo contest.

MM: I ask about the repertoire of that time.

EM: A lot of ballads, nonsense songs. Songs with strong morals + messages.

EM: One I like from WV is called "Queen of the Earth, Child of the Skies" and it's one of these old pieces with connections to the singing traditions. Some of the old fiddlers didn't sing, but rather "sang" with the fiddle. It took some time, but I finally found a recording of someone playing this tune. It's in D-D-A-D tuning, beautiful, tuned like a dulcimer. Anyways, it's Warren Cronin from WV from 1940 and it was in this old archive. He plays it on a fiddle and then stops and starts singing and I was like: "I knew it had words!"

It was often played in funerals it was played in the Hammonds family and other places. Before that, Ireland and before that England and refers to royalty. The person in the song goes: "I'll follow my blackbird wherever he goes." It's very beautiful. It was popular as a Set Dance in Ireland. And the slow version remained popular in the Southern States and spread around.

MM: In what fiddle tradition do you most identify with?

EM: I spent a lot of time learning in WV first and then a lot of time in KY. I sort of feel almost like a linguist. I'm fascinated by the differences between regional styles. They're harder to hear nowadays. I love listening to how the older people spoke, the accents, it's endlessly fascinating to me. How they vary. I'll always be learning on this instrument. I've been playing for 40 years and I'm just scratching the surface. It's endless.

[Holds up fiddle] Wooden box, hairy stick, tree sap and let's go! It's just endless.

I love to learn from people firsthand. I have a great respect for what has come before. I love to see the traditional music carried forward.

MM: Before the first lesson, what would you like your students to do?

EM: They should stay loose—cause there’s nothing “tight” on this instrument. And they are learning a new language—like dialect—and you need to hear a lot of the “mother tongue.” Whatever style you want to play in, you need to listen to a LOT of it and listen deeply and intently. If you just learn it from a book, your accent will be terrible. Treat it like language immersion. Listen to as much as possible because then you’re recreating the oral / aural tradition. This music is learned by ear. There is no way to really write it down properly. You can’t show bow pressure and bow speed very well. It doesn’t lend itself very well to the written page. So you have to pick up the dialect. You just need to listen.

MM: Why do you compete in fiddle contests?

EM: These are old traditions. It’s nice to participate and be a part of the tradition. One of my favorite moments is when they hand out the numbers and then you walk around and ask friends what number they got. I really used to have terrible stage fright. But I’ve forced myself to do it anyways because I just want to be a part of the contest. Now I enjoy being thrown into a band on the spot with musicians I’ve never played music with. It’s fun.

It inspires a lot of kids. It keeps them playing. You get a ribbon or a participatory ribbon, it inspires the younger generation. Being in a jam lifts you—it’s exciting, there’s an amazing energy by the green truck. I love the dance tradition around here. It’s completely organic. The power—the energy is so powerful!



8.

Carl Jones: It's a tricky line to walk. Less is often best. Sometimes a fiddler will give me stink eye and I know not to repeat that chord the next time around.

CJ: I'm Carl Clifford Jones from Macon, Georgia.

My mother (Jewel Dean Canon) would sing country songs—she liked Hank Williams and she'd play piano a little bit “Your Cheaten’ Heart.” And “Beautiful Dreamer,” she liked Steven Foster. She wasn’t a great piano player, but she made up for it in enthusiasm.

MM: Who was your first teacher?

CJ: Charles Bryant out of Lithonia, Georgia. OTM really kicked in when I went to college. U of N. Alabama (Florence) I happened to buy an old mandolin on the way at Coleman Alabama Joe C. Sapp and when I showed up, the BG band banjo player (Scooter Muse, a good friend of mine to this day), saw me with it and insisted I join their band. I said no but they insisted. This process of humiliation made me learn quick. “Fox on the Run” was an early tune they

played. Scooter got me going to the festivals and the conventions. The main one was “Horsepens 40” in Steele, AL.

MM: What’s the function of guitar in OTM?

CJ: The guitar is a little problematic because of the chord choices. People ask me: “How do you know the right chords?” but it’s different for each player, you know. One person might be doing too many or not enough. Putting in a minor, when it should be a major—it’s always a can of worms. It’s mainly the rhythm—the real mantra-esque, trance-like beat. But then, I kinda of like to outline the melody a little bit. I like finger-picking behind fiddle tunes too. I think it can be real pretty (esp. waltzes.)

MM: What about the tune “Sally Ann?” Could you demonstrate the guitar in that tune?

CJ: Well, with Sally Ann you have an issue right away-- do you go to the G chord or stay in D? Some people like one or the other. I might go to G and the fiddler will look at me funny and I know I should stay in D. My goal is for the back-up to be melodic in its own right-- to have something pretty even by itself. Musical, but not overdone. It’s a tricky line to walk.

Less is often best. Sometimes a fiddler will give me stink eye and I know not to repeat that chord the next time around. But I get excited and have fun because the chords are a little avenue to figure out the puzzle. I like that challenge. A good default is to find the melody a little bit in the bass walk.



9.

Kevin Fore: So we sat there about 2 hours and played and I never thought that a week later he'd be gone. But something told me right then, when we was playin' to let him know how much he'd meant to me.

KF: I'm Kevin Fore, I live in Galax, VA, I was born in Galax in 1974, carried right down the mountain and lived 37 years down in Low Gap.

MM: Where are we right now?

KF: We're at Edmonds Guitar Shop on South Main Street in Galax.

MM: What do you do for a living?

KF: Right now, working on building some instruments, banjos, I was in the heating and air trade for several years till my health got bad. I had to give that up. Been still dealing with some health issues.

KF: I was born and raised in the heating and air trade with my daddy. I always followed him around, crawling in and up under houses with him and I think my problems come from that.

Back in them days, you never thought about wearing a mask.

KF: I never actually met Kyle Creed. But I was influenced by him. Both his style of playing and his banjo building. One of the first recordings I got around 2001,

KF: His banjo building was real unique. He had his own way of doing things. He figured out a scale length where he could pull the bridge closer to the center of the head and get more of a deeper, mellow sound—a sound more like the old-timers, from way back. He noticed that a lot of the fretless players around

Beulah and Round Peak usually had the bridge towards the center of the head. So he came up with his own formula.

KF: He got crisp, clean notes off the banjo. And he was a real good fiddle player, too. Each note stands out from the others. That's a Round Peak style, cause everything was focused on the melody.

MM: When did you begin playing music?

KF: Before music, I drove a dirt-track race car for 3 years as a hobby. Then I started having breathing problems. My doctor told me I needed to find something else to do. So, back in 1999, I was at my uncle's house one Friday night, and he said let's go to the square dance where Benton Flippen was playing (my uncle's great-uncle.) So, we went up to Sparta to the Alleghany Jubilee and that's when I first heard the music. Something just told me to get rid of my race car. So I sold my race car and got a bass boat and a banjo.

KF: I wanted to learn to play like the old-timers did. I did take a few lessons, but it wasn't for me. I started going to Benton's house and he'd play the fiddle, and I'd try to follow along. I didn't have my banjo a little over a month, but I always kept it behind the seat in my pick-up. And I went up to the Alleghany Jubilee, to the dance again, there wasn't a banjo player there. I didn't know but probably 2 or 3 tunes. Benton and my buddy Grey Bryant walked up to me and Benton said: "Kevin, did you bring your banjer?" I said I did. He said: "We don't have a banjo player tonight." I said: "Well, Benton, I'm not good enough to play with you." He said: "You gotta learn somehow. Go get it."

KF: So, I went and got my banjo and stood up there scared to death for 3 hours! I said, "Don't you dare put a mic on me!"

KF: That was the best experience I've ever had. And I was close to Benton ever since, right up to when he passed. [in 2011.]

MM: That's a trial by fire.

KF: He [Benton] said you learn these tunes by playing at a square dance. When you play one tune for ten or fifteen minutes, he said you're bound to learn it. I ended up helping Benton out—him and his wife—I got to play with him exactly a week before he passed. My grandma fixed him some food. His favorite food was green beans and potatoes and corn bread. So I carried it to him and we sit there and talked a while. I wasn't going to mention music, 'cause I know he hadn't been playing for the past few months. We were just

talking about life stuff and he asked me: “Have you been pickin’ the banjer?” and I said “A little bit.” Then I thought I’d ask him about the fiddle. I said: “Benton, have you been fiddlin’ any?” He said: “No, I just ain’t had it in me.” I said: “Well that’s alright.” I said: “You’ve done pulled your time on the fiddle.” And, about 15 minutes went by and he said: “How ‘bout let’s strike up a tune?” He said: “Go in my cedar wardrobe and get my banjo and fiddle and we’ll play.” So we sat there about 2 hours and played and I never thought that a week later he’d be gone. But something told me right then, when we was playin’ to let him know how much he’d meant to me. And his friendship and learned me to play. So I told him how much his friendship and everything meant.

KF: To me, it’s not just about playing music. You gotta know the history. Knowing the background of the tunes. I always said: “The musicians around these parts—they live their music.” Their lifestyle came out in what they played. After a hard day’s work, there wasn’t TV back then-- they got their instruments out and played. Their day’s work came out in the music.

KF: It’s the Round Peak style. In the early days it was mostly played on a fretless banjo. That’s all they had. They had to make their own. Most played up here on the neck. Some say Kyle was the innovator of that, but that’s not true. I played Charlie Lowe’s banjo (currently at a museum in Mt. Airy), and he was born in the later 1800’s. And you can see the marks up the neck where he used to play it.

KF: The RP style has a distinct melody with all the notes coming out clear. No real frailing going on. It’s more precision.

KF: Back in 2008 I started documenting all of Kyle’s banjos. In 1960-61, Kyle built Fred Cockerham (3 November 1905 - July 8, 1980) a banjo like this (with a Formica neck.) In 2011, I went to the Smithsonian (with Trish and Kirk) and I got to measure Fred’s banjo.

KF: The fretless banjo uses a lot of slides and everything. That’s what they’re there for, to get those bluesy sounds.

KJ: Years ago, people said: “Down the Mountain” (meaning Around Low Gap) and “Up the Mountain” meaning Around Galax. Most people use one finger. I use 2—these 2 [index and middle] and my thumb.



10.

Andrew Vogt: At Galax, the audience likes what I play, but the judges don't. They never did, really, because I'm not playing traditionally.

MM: What is your earliest musical memory?

AV: We had violins around the house and I picked one up around 2 and started lessons when I was 4. I liked playing violin.

MM: Who played it?

AV: Nobody. We just had random instruments everywhere. My mom played bagpipes.

MM: When did it become really musical for you?

AV: We saw Chinese violinist Xiang Gao (U of Delaware) and I became inspired to play. And I started classical lessons.

MM: How about OTM?

AV: When I was 6, my mom took me on a "Fiddle Train" across Canada run by Alistair Frazier and Natalie Hoss a great Scottish Fiddle Cello Duo, and they taught me all the techniques I still use. Alistair is the best teacher I ever had & I started attending his fiddle camps every summer, so I really started with more Celtic stuff. Scottish with Kate Breton. And then I would go to festivals around here (which were more BG), so I started playing BG.

And then I met banjoist Victor Furtado, one of the best CH banjoists, ever. We met in Berlin, Maryland at a fiddle competition and started a band. And he got me into Appalachian Trad. Stuff.

MM: How old?

AV: Nine. Now we're at college together, so we've playing together ever since.

MM: Do you see yourself as doing something different from other OT fiddlers? And, if so, what?

AV: Yes, definitely. I have respect for traditionalists who keep the traditions alive. That style, the old style, WV, cause that's the style I've grown up around. Some of my favorite players like Jay Crack (Who learned from Clark Kessinger and Bobby Taylor. That's great. And I love that. But, for me, I'm actually more of a Rock and Roll musician with electric violin and rock stuff. I've always just pushed OT as far as I could with rhythmic bowing and taking the original bounce patterns from the traditional guys and turning it into a whole new thing. Trying to come up with new rhythmic patterns—kind of like cellist Rushad Eggleston, who has been doing this for a long time with the bounces. I really like rhythm so I do as much as I can.

And people don't like it. People think it's not traditional.

MM: Has anyone actually said that to you?

AV: People get upset because we make it more flashy with weirder rhythms and a lot of improvising which is not common in OTM. And we do a lot of original (weirder) tunes based on OT. But weird.

MM: I saw your performance as something refreshing and you seem to be building on others. Let's take the tune "Red Bird."

Could you take me through what you're doing with that tune?

AV: [Gets his instrument] One thing right off the bat, that makes this less traditional is the 5-string violin. So you have this low C (right now it's a E.) I got into 5-string violins because of Darol Anger a great friend and mentor. The rhythmic possibilities are beyond what you can get with a 4-string.

[He plays.]

AV: Here's the bounces. Traditionally it's like this:

I learned these bouncing techniques from JC and BT (from WV). Once I got better at that and it was easier, I thought, "Well, let me tighten my bow." And really do it harder than anybody else. And then I turned that into other things [demos patterns.] I was at a camp in WV, and I just kept playing it in my hotel room. Playing it over and over.

MM: How was it received?

AV: At Galax? At Galax, the audience likes what I play, but the judges don't. They never did, really, because I'm not playing traditionally. Then one year, we had a saxophonist friend who we wanted to join us cause he had come all the way from NY. The staff said no, so he hid his sax under a poncho and pulled it out on stage and basically we got unplugged. That year, Victor Furtado (who had won banjo for the past couple years) didn't even place, and neither did I (smiles.) I never place that high at Galax cause I always do something weird just to mess with the judges.

MM: Help me understand why you choose to do that.

AV: When I was younger (8,9,10), I took it really seriously and it made me really frustrated cause all contests have their favorite sort of people. Regionally, if you're not from Virginia or Kentucky or Tennessee or West Virginia, you're chances of placing are lower.

I've always been kind of an outsider (coming from up here.) I kind of just gave up on contests cause it doesn't matter. What I like to do is what I like to do. So I just play the way I like to play because I know that the audience likes when our band plays because they know us as being different. If the judges don't like it, it's OK.

MM: How would you label yourself?

AV: I do my best to show respect to the traditions and the style because I love it, but at the same time I'm just going to rock out, as much as I can.

MM: Are you hinting towards some possibilities?

AV: There are definitely people moving the style forward. And I think I've given what I had to offer to the style, and I'll always love OTM, but I'm moving on more to rock. Now it's time to show rock that you don't need a guitarist (or even a bassist), you just have a violin. (Smiles)

MM: How do you approach your lessons with Max?

AV: I've had a lot of students (OT), but Max was the first and I'll never have another one like him. He was already good when we started (at 6) I take 1% credit for his ability because he works harder than I've ever worked on anything. We learned a lot together and taught each other a lot because it's my first time as a teacher. He taught me more than I taught him. He loves everything I'm telling him and he really soaks it up. Max is so much fun to teach. I see the better version of myself in him—what I could have been doing. And I want to

encourage him to do all the good things that I didn't do and stay away from all the bad things I did do. It's like having a little brother. We're really close.

MM: In today's lesson, did you do your own version of bouncing with Max?

AV: He's like the one person who gets it. If there's one thing that sets our playing apart, it's the rhythmic technique—it's a whole other rhythmic aspect that others don't focus on.

MM: He took second place in the Youth category last summer and probably could have taken first. It doesn't seem to be as much of an issue.

AV: Yeah, he toned it down for the contest. He'll start to see that the contests aren't that important. His shows are a lot more important than the contests. He's had a lot of great shows, too for his age.

MM: Is the 5-string allowed in contests?

AV: I don't play on the fifth string. I just play on these 4 strings.

MM: What's Berklee like?

AV: Berklee is whatever you are able to make of it. I'm lucky because I don't have to pay (people in the strings dept.) I love my private teacher Rob Thomas, he's helped me get a lot better. School is school, I'm not sure if I'll graduate or not, we'll see what opportunities come up.

MM: How old are you?

AV: I'm 19, as of February.

MM: I would think the degree would give you opportunities.

AV: The way most of us see it as a way to meet each other and make music and the degree is kind of worthless. You don't need a paper to prove that you're good at playing your instrument. I think that's why a lot of people kind of leave when they're ready.

Obviously, I'd want some plan in place. I'm not just going to walk away but right now school's cancelled for the rest of the semester for Corona Virus.

MM: What will you do?

AV: My band is going to come here and we're going to do our rock album, so that's exciting.



11.

Maxwell Brown: “Every day I practice for about two hours. When I practice, it’s not like super-fun, but when I’m done, I appreciate the outcom.”

MM: How long have you been playing the violin?

MB: I’ve been playing for 5 years but fiddle music only 3.

MM: Why the violin?

MB: When I was little I was interested in the guitar, but my fingers were too small. So they decided on the violin and I started taking lessons at Suzuki.

I started playing OT music in a group my teacher started and I met Andrew at a festival.

My first tunes were Irish. But then I did “Red Haired Boy” which is Irish but can also be considered OT.

MM: When you play OT vs. Classical, do you have to think different?

MB: Yeah, there’s like specific arrangements for fiddle tunes. It’s looser.

There are more rules in Classical music, not that that’s bad or anything. In fiddle, you have to think—more than the notes you’re playing—it’s HOW you play those notes.

There are two modes for music: Practice mode and Performance mode. I feel pretty good about it. It’s fun to perform. I prefer playing with an audience.

MM: How important is your mom?

MB: Pretty important. She’s there at my lessons and dose my YouTube and my website.

MB: There are different styles of Classical music. Like in fiddle there’s BG, there’s OT, there’s Celtic, Irish, Scottish, you name it. And in classical there are

different styles too and those styles have different characteristics. So, I think this piece is Romantic, I guess, and that would have different characteristics than, say, Baroque which I think is more like fiddle music.

MM: How old are you?

MB: 8, I turn nine on the 18th, which is in a couple days.

How often do you practice?

MB: Every day, I practice for about 2 hours. When I practice, it's not like super-fun, but when I'm done, I appreciate the outcome.

MM: Explain.

MB: I know that if I didn't practice I wouldn't be able to play this way.

MM: First lesson with Andrew?

MB: I was 6, close to 7 I think?

MM: How does Andrew's teaching differ from other teachers?

MB: The teaching doesn't really differ. There's only certain styles that are good. I like when teachers break it down and let you do the song, which Andrew does.

Not overcriticizing.. You shouldn't give all compliments.

Not so much in classical, but in OT, there are different ways to tune to fiddle. The regular tuning for a violin or fiddle, would be G-D-A-E, but there's different tunings like A-E-A-E or A-D-A-E for example, on "Durang's Hornpipe", this is the same as this A, so I can drone that note, if this string is tuned normally I wouldn't be able to play that.



12. & 13.

Gerry Canote: Greg came back from seeing them play live and he said: “You gotta hear this music! It sounds like a beehive on fire!”

Greg: Our parents met dancing in a folk dance group in Stockton, California.

Gerry: Dad was a piano player and he played every night after dinner—so we really had music in the house all the time. When I was a sophomore in HS, he gave me a guitar for Christmas and that’s all I wanted to do. We did mostly folk and blues, but then Greg started doing Country-Western music and played in The El-Rancho Cowboys in the Santa-Clara Valley, CA. Then we played in a BG band called “Curly Maple” and we played at pizza parlors during the 70’s.

Greg and Gerry: Then, in the late 70’s, we met fiddler Don Minnerly and he taught us some tunes and we started going to an OTM Festival in Port Townsend, Washington. That’s where we met guitarist Sandy Bradley (Gypsy Gyppo String band.) We started touring with her (80-83.) We played in every state except for Maine and Mississippi. We had a near-fatal car accident in Virginia and decided to get off the road. So, we came home and started a live radio show on KOW in Seattle. We did that for 13 years. We had to come up with new material, so we started doing more jazzy stuff and novelty songs. We had a great jazz pianist, Barney McClure, and sax player Denny Goodhue.

MM: Tell me a little about OTM.

Greg: When we first heard it, we identified with it, but we didn’t know what it was. We drove to the Berkeley 2nd Annual Old-Time Fiddler’s Convention. We saw banjo player Matt Benford and guitarist/ fiddler Jack Link.

Gerry: Greg came back from seeing them play live and he said: “You gotta

hear this music! It sounds like a beehive on fire!” That got our feet wet, and then we started going to festivals and playing more.

Greg: We play OTM and novelty songs recorded in the 1920’s. And a lot of Charlie Poole, Uncle Dave Macon, etc.

[They play: “Down in the Old Hometown.”]

MM: What’s it like performing with your sibling?

Greg: We kind of think alike, so communication is pretty easy.

Gerry: And we’ve been playing so long on stage that we are very relaxed. I trust Greg’s playing—I know he’s never going to make a mistake. [Both laugh.]

At first we had put each other up on pedestals, but then we realized we should just support each other. We know twins that don’t get along—that don’t like each other and that’s a terrible thing.

Gerry: It’s such a great gimmick and a gift to be twins in the first place.

Greg: Twins sometimes lump their birthday’s together. We just celebrated our 134th birthday (67 x 2.)

MM: What do you do outside of performing?

Gerry: I build banjos and banjo-ukuleles. We teach a regular string band class in Seattle.

Greg: in spring through fall we do music camps like ABC in Washington.

MM: How does OTM differ (in Seattle/California) from the East coast?

Greg: I don’t know. We play a little slower (more laid back.)

Both: The internet’s made it so much more accessible, the repertoire is not that different.

And we go to Clifftop [WV] a lot and learn tunes there from people. We share a lot of our music on our website The Mossy Roof and they learn the tunes that we teach in Seattle.

Greg: Seattle and Portland both have regular jamming sessions and a vibrant OT scene.