Artwork by Emily Isbell

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I write this, Thanksgiving has passed, we are mid-Hanukkah, and Christmas is right around the corner. It's a nice time to reflect on the year that was and be gracious for, among other things, the tremendous love and support in our little Bluegrass community here in Central Texas.

Y'all may have heard (ha) but Oskar Blues (and its parent company Canarchy and ITS parent company Monster Energy Drinks) shuttered their Austin brewing operations with no notice ten days before the Annual Meeting. It was a stressful day, we had to scramble, but thanks to the incredible efforts of the CTBA Board of Directors (and Our Good Friend **Beth Chrisman**) we were able to relocate the event to **Sagebrush**.

More on the event and Sagebrush's incredible support of our organization below. But this is all to say: I am incredibly grateful for Oskar Blues' tremendous support over the past five-plus years, I am incredibly grateful for Oskar Blues' continued support of Bluegrass at all of their extant locations, and I am incredibly grateful to Sagebrush for stepping up and getting involved in promoting and supporting Bluegrass in Central Texas.

But, most incredibly, I am grateful that the membership of Central Texas Bluegrass has elected me to serve another two-year term (again, more on that below). I hope to continue serving as President; I hope to continue doing well by this 45-year-old organization for at least another amazing year.

Feel free to reach out anytime, I'm at **President@CentralTexasBluegrass.org**. Here's to 2024!

Jon Lundbom, President, CTBA

ANNUAL MEETING & SHOW RECAP

by Simon Waxman

It was the second of November, ten days 'til the Annual Meeting & Show. For months, event preparations had proceeded with steadiness and surety, as though guided by a far-sighted helmsman. So the CTBA board was gobsmacked when word came just before eleven that morning of the second. “EMERGENCY,” CTBA President Jon Lundbom wrote us in all-caps. Oskar Blues taproom, our host for the annual meeting and show, was shutting its doors effective immediately. I won’t pretend curses didn’t fly.

And then! To the rescue came the good people of the South Austin dancehall **Sagebrush**. It was famed local fiddle-slinger**Beth Chrisman** who championed the CTBA’s cause. With Beth’s assistance, President Jon was able to secure booking on the briefest notice. Deep sighs of relief issue from the board. Then too, the moment bore a quality of frisson. All were sorry to see Oskar Blues go - but what if Sagebrush turned out to be the ideal venue?

The afternoon of the Annual Meeting & Show was upon us. Early arrivals toted instruments into the dancehall and filled its ample expanse with spirited jamming. In advance of the afternoon’s first performance, more and more Bluegrass fans joined the merriment. Friends old and new greeted each other, and some partook of a little CTBA merch. (T-shirts are **available in all sizes**!) The Board announced the winners of the association’s recent uncontested election.

Now the lights shone on the rich red velvet curtains of the Sagebrush stage. Attendees eagerly took seats, and the concert commenced with **The Karl Shiflett & Big Country Show**. A consummate professional who has thrilled three decades of listeners, Shiflett easily won over this audience with his warbling vocal style, humorous banter, and old-world appeal. The band, prominently featuring the CTBA's own **Celebrindal Roberts** sawing the fiddle, was first-rate.

Finally it was time for the main event. **The Po' Ramblin' Boys** had arrived from Nashville with a lofty reputation and natty duds to match. Well, if the unchecked enthusiasm of the audience was any measure, the performance met all expectations. Here is a band with personality, my friends. Our Central Texas bluegrass community knows good music when they hear it, and the Po Ramblin' Boys delivered heaps at the 2023 CTBA Annual Meeting & Show.

Sagebrush did turn out to be the perfect venue. And the CTBA looks forward to more jams there. In case you hadn't heard, **Sagebrush** (5500 S. Congress), is the **new host** of the **CTBA Sunday Bluegrass Jam**, every **Sunday at 3PM.**

A huge thanks to **Sagebrush**, **Karl Shiflett**, the **Po' Ramblin' Boys**, and **Beth Chrisman** for helping make this year's event so much fun. And thanks most of all to the **CTBA members** who have kept this community going strong since 1978.

CTBA SUNDAY JAM UPDATE

In case you missed the last email blast (and Simon's note above): we have a **new home for the CTBA Sunday Bluegrass Jam!**

Sagebrush

Going forward, we will be pickin' at **Sagebrush** (5500 S Congress Ave, Austin 78745). Sagebrush came though big-time and was a fantastic host for our Annual Meeting. And as far as jam spaces go: (1) it's central; (2) they have plenty of parking; (3) they have tons of outdoor space; and (4) they have tons of inside space. Most importantly, they are **huge supporters of the CTBA** and **excited to host our Sunday jam**!

We've been jamming just about **every Sunday afternoon since 1978**, let's keep the tradition going, y'all.

PLEASE NOTE there will be **no jam** on **Sunday, March 17th**.

CTBA BAND SCRAMBLE & GARAGE SALE UPDATE

Another update: the next **CTBA Band Scramble & Garage Sale** will STILL be held on **Sunday, March 3rd, 2024**. But it will now be held at **Sagebrush**!

Many thanks to Oskar Blues for years of incredible support, and many thanks to **Sagebrush** for stepping up and getting involved!

CTBA WILLA BEACH-PORTER SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE

The CTBA is thrilled to announce **we have awarded two more ArtistWorks scholarships**! Congratulations to CTBA members **Cristian Lieneck** and **Chris Murdock.**

Cristian Lieneck began playing mandolin over 20 years ago to impress his future in-laws who needed a mandolin player for their family jam sessions. Since then, he continues to play regularly with them and at other jam sessions across central Texas. He is a regular at the Sunday Suds Monkey jam in Dripping Springs, located close to his home in South Austin. Cristian is looking forward to his **ArtistWorks** experience and taking his bluegrass playing to the next level!

"Thank you CTBA and the bluegrass community everywhere! I found what I didn't know I was looking for when I was invited to my first bluegrass jam around 2015. I first started playing guitar as a teenager, but things really got fun once I realized how many bluegrass songs I just had to learn. I'm looking forward to many more years of bluegrassin' around Texas and beyond." - **Chris Murdock**

ArtistWorks.com
LEARN FROM MASTERS

Many thanks to **ArtistWorks** for **partnering with the CTBA** and **making these scholarships available** to bluegrass musicians across the great state of Texas. And there are still ArtistWorks scholarships on offer! Each scholarship recipient will receive a **one-year ArtistWorks membership** to the study track of their choice from the 30+ courses offered through ArtistWorks. ArtistWorks scholarships are available to **any Texas resident aged 12 years or older** (no age limit).

And, of course, we are now accepting applications for **2024 CTBA Willa Beach-Porter Scholarships**!

If you or someone you know is interested in **attending a bluegrass camp**, please consider applying for a scholarship! CTBA Willa-Beach Porter Scholarships are available to **any Texas resident aged 12-18**.

If you or someone you know is interested in a scholarship, head on over to **CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Scholarship** and apply today!

CTBA 2024-2025 BOARD ELECTIONS

Well, there were four CTBA Board Members running for re-election to the CTBA Board of Directors, and **all four were elected** in a landslide!

Congratulations to **Jon Lundbom, Julian Root, Kyle Kline,** and **Lenny Nichols** on their election to (yet) another two-year term!

ALAN MUNDE'S *EXCELSIOR*

ALBUM REVIEW
by Julian Root, Newsletter Editor

Thanks to the windfall received by winning the illustrious **Steve Martin Banjo Prize**, (formerly local) banjo hero **Alan Munde** took to the road once again, visiting old friends and distant memories of 50+ years in bluegrass music. Along the way, he recorded thirteen original tunes - and two composed by Central Texas 'grasser Elliot Rogers - in nine different studios spanning numerous time zones. The result is **2023's *Excelsior*,** out now on **Patuxent Music.**

For years, I've maintained that Al is a world class musician whose primary impact has been in the world of bluegrass banjo. Never to be limited to the snarl and panache of driving bluegrass alone, this latest album is strong evidence supporting that claim. Joined by an impressive cast of **21 musicians local to Central Texas and beyond**, we have here an album not of bluegrass banjo playing (though there is some of that), but a collection of **sophisticated and significant contributions to the pantheon of banjo music.**

Mandolin fans rejoice! **Sam Bush, Billy Bright, Kym Warner, Paul Glasse,** (former CTBA board member) **Noah Jeffries, Don Stiernberg, Emory Lester, Ron Pennington, Jayson Chapman,** and **Steve Smith** all add "mandolin hugs" to this album. 'Stay With Me Waltz' is a standout mandolin (and mandola) feature. Other notable contributors are Austin's own **Dom Fisher** and legend **Lloyd Maines**.

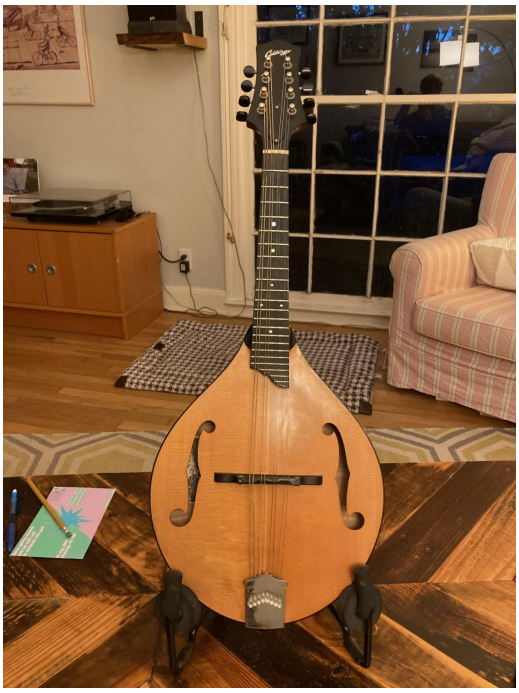
'Ten Cent Breakfast' is, allegedly, the first tune Al wrote at the age of 16. Al's brilliant banjo voice leading and immaculate knowledge of the fretboard are really on display on 'Blue Hole Stroll' and 'Birthday Waltz.' Unlike other (unnamed) banjo visionaries and virtuosos , Al never beats you over the head with his understanding of music or his technical proficiency - it

introduces itself humbly and authentically, without seeming cavalier or esoteric. Classic wizardry more akin to bluegrass is presented in 'Byron's Buddies,' a traditional three-part competition-style fiddle tune in honor of **Byron Berline**, as well as 'Five Fall Down,' which has "favorite" tune written all over it.

Download or **order** your copy of ***Excelsior*** today!

MARKETPLACE

For sale in Austin: **2011 Collings MT mandolin** in honey-amber color. One owner. Heavily played with mature tone. Instrument has playwear as well as a fully repaired, 100%-stable, minimally visible top crack, which has no effect on tone or playability and was recently inspected and given a clean bill of health by a former Collings luthier. Includes unused, mint-condition Collings-brand TKL hardshell case with green plush interior. $2500; 2% of sale price donated to CTBA. Email **Simon Waxman** for more info.



THE "SNUFFY JENKINS" RB-4

BLUEGRASS HISTORY COMES TO AUSTIN

The Bluegrass (banjo) world was rattled in November when it was announced that the **prewar Gibson RB-4 banjo** that belonged to **Snuffy Jenkins** (progenitor of the three-finger style or "Scruggs" style of banjo playing) had sold. The Central Texas Bluegrass (banjo) community was further rattled when it turned out that a **friend and CTBA Business Member was bringing the banjo to Austin**!

HUGE congratulations to **long-time CTBA Business Member James Brown** (of **Barton Springs Mill**) on acquiring one of the rarest, most special pieces of Bluegrass history on the planet. Here's what James has to say:

"Big, big day Saturday. I became the custodian of this Bluegrass treasure: 1934 Gibson RB-4 FON 9639-1. This was the lifelong companion of bluegrass legend DeWitt 'Snuffy' Jenkins. When Snuffy bought the banjo from a pawnshop in 1940 for $60, he thought it sounded better than his 1930 Gibson Granada. He sold that Granada to Don Reno, who then sold it to Earl Scruggs. As youngsters Reno and Scruggs saw/heard Jenkins play, utilizing a right hand technique that they would further develop, changing the course of Bluegrass history. This completely original RB-4 and Butch Robins' may be the two finest existing examples Gibson ever made. Thanks to Ceres Banjo Works for making this happen!"

Again, **HUGE congratulations**, James! We couldn't be more excited for you.

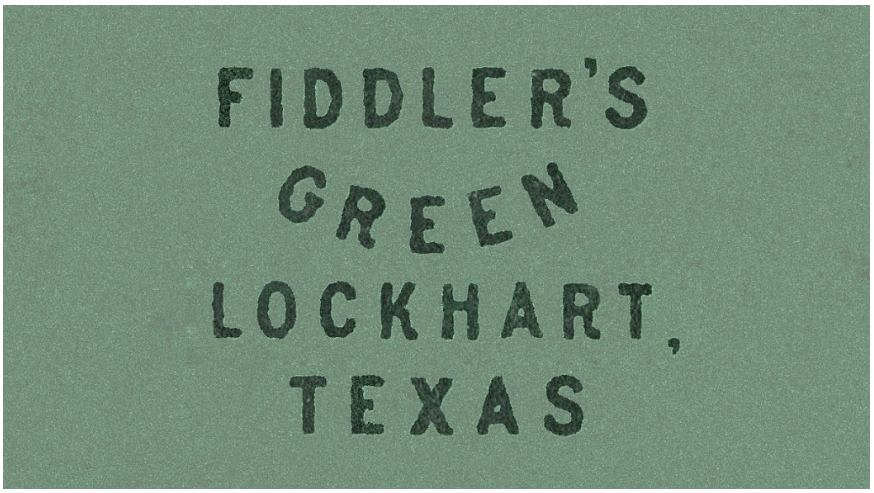
NOTE FROM YOUR EDITOR: *Check out 'Carolina Bluegrass' on Arhoolie Records for a fantastic introduction to the style and humor unique to Snuffy Jenkins. Oh yeah - that's the aforementioned banjo he's playing on the cover!*

DARREN NICHOLSON BAND AT MERCER DANCE HALL

Head's up, y'all: **Darren Nicholson** (formerly of **Balsam Range**) is bringing his band to the **Mercer Dance Hall** on **Friday, January 12th**. Mark your calendars!

FIDDLER'S GREEN MUSIC SHOP

CTBA BUSINESS MEMBER FEATURE
by Christopher Melas



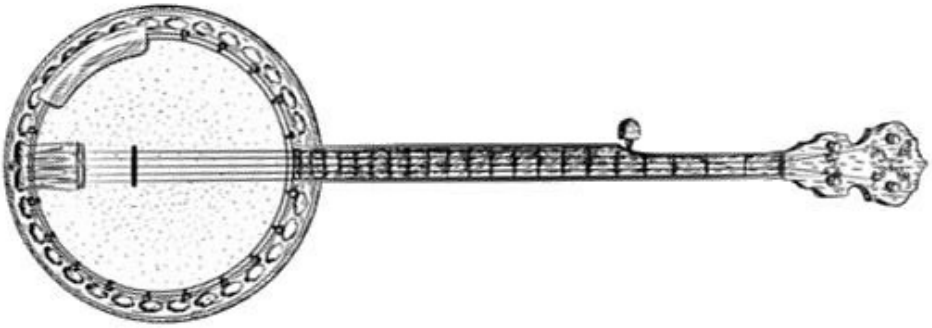
Fiddler's Green is undoubtedly one of the best acoustic instrument shops in the country. Known online and locally as one of the first places stringed instrument lovers should check, it is located right off of Lockhart, Texas' beautiful town square and is run by a lovely couple, Ben and Jen Hodges. The shop was originally founded in Memphis Tennessee, by Clay Levit who hired his first employee, Ben Hodges, in 2005. Ben bought his first mandolin there, and the two became friends. Eventually Clay decided to move the shop back to his hometown of Austin TX, asking Ben if he wanted to make the move as well. The shop reopened in Austin in 2008 with Ben acting as manager and the sole employee for many years. The shop's Austin location was a beautiful old house with an all wood interior, and instruments draped over the walls. The shop's four rooms were impressively organized, making the house feel like it was always meant to be a music shop. While working at the shop Ben met his future wife Jen, an incredible local musician who worked at a garden center across the street and happened to stop by the shop to purchase an instructional book.

Over time the shop's instrument selection and number of employees began to grow. On a typical business day you would hear great local musicians testing great instruments which would reverberate through the shop's old wooden interior. The phone would ring often, with out-of-town customers asking enthusiastically for details on instruments they had seen on the website. The shop became known locally and online for being run by honest people who always tried to give you a great deal.

In 2020, three weeks before the COVID lockdowns, Ben Hodges became the owner of the shop. As a result of the pandemic and all the difficulties small businesses would have to endure, Ben decided to move the shop to Lockhart where he and his family had been living for years. Although Austin lost its best acoustic instrument shop, Lockhart welcomed Fiddler's Green. Jen began working at the shop as well, and has contributed greatly to its flourishing in the new location. It seems that no matter where the shop is, it continues to be visually beautiful with excellent customer service and a great selection of instruments of all levels hanging on the walls. In 2023, Ben and Jen started an incredible bluegrass band, **Alley Grass**, that regularly performs across Central Texas. Although Austin greatly misses Fiddler's Green, it's good to see them doing so well - and less than an hour's drive from Austin!

CTBA MEMBER-BANDS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **bands** as members and wholeheartedly recommend them for all of your Central Texas bluegrass needs!



Austin Monday Nighters
Black Diamond
Bobby Giles & Texas Gales
Brand New Key
Four Fights Per Pint
The Greenlawn Rangers
The Hillsiders
Long Prairie
The McKinleys
MoPac Traffic Jams
Randy Collier & Grassland
The Sieker Band
Strawberry Flats
Texas String Assembly
Wayside Bluegrass

If your band is interested in becoming a CTBA member, please visit **CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join** or contact us at **CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org** to learn more.

CTBA BUSINESS MEMBERS

The CTBA is proud to have the following **businesses** as members, please consider supporting them as they support Bluegrass in Central Texas!

Barton Springs Mill
Central Machine Works
Country Guitar Online
Fiddler's Green Music Shop
Lazarus Brewing Co.
Madrone Coffee Co.
Oh Boy! Print Shop
Old Settlers Music Fest
Shades of Bluegrass
St. Elmo Brewing Co.
Texas Bluegrass Music
Vista Brewing
Woodtone Strings

If you and your business are interested in becoming a part of the CTBA, please head on over to **CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join** or reach out at **CTBA@CentralTexasBluegrass.org**.

'Possum with the WiFi Password

...and other juxtapositions
by your editor, Julian Root

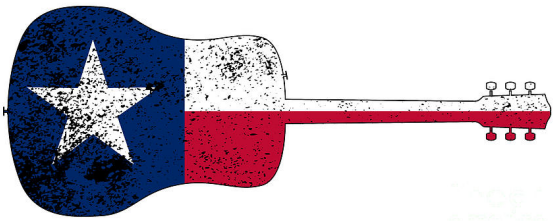
This Saturday, January 6th, marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Earl Scruggs. I won't belabor the importance of his contributions to bluegrass or the American musical subconscious at large - that'd be an exercise in repetition as tiresome as the practice of the banjo rolls defining his style.

Rather, I'll make (relatively) public my claim that Earl is the most imitated musician in America, if not the world. Sure, for every student of bluegrass banjo there may be 100 aspiring rock guitarists, but those guitarists have a tradition - talk about tiresome repetition - of haughty pronouncements of who THEY believe is the "greatest."

Not so with students of bluegrass banjo. While there may (and should) be variance in personal favorites, everyone starts - and most continue - with Earl. One may develop a mastery of rock guitar without ever learning a lick by

the likes of Clapton, Page, or Gilmour. I would wager that not a single competent bluegrass banjoist is unequipped with the ability to imitate at least a handful of licks developed by Earl. I do not know of a beginner banjo course that is not, in essence, a study of Earl's playing. Django Reinhardt is the only other style pioneer I can think of with such a hold on a genre.

Earl's style is THE style where bluegrass banjo is concerned. Oh, and for your promised juxtaposition: while everyone knows that Earl introduced bluegrass banjo to the masses, many do not know that Earl introduced Kentucky Fried Chicken to Ravi Shankar. Happy Googling, friends!



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