



# Reel Times

Newsletter of  
The Austin Friends of Traditional Music

Summer 2017

## Reel Times visits the Stone Soup Jam!



***Dave Polacheck and family celebrate his 70th Birthday  
at the Stone Soup Jam in April***

## ***Christy Foster sings and plays a tune at the Stone Soup Jam***



The Austin, Texas area is blessed with several ongoing acoustic jams, many of them held every week. The AFTM website lists weekly jams for Cajun, old time, bluegrass, Scandinavian, Irish and other traditional music forms.

On the third Sunday of the month, however, there's a jam that welcomes all these genres, as well as any form of traditional music. It's the Stone Soup Jam at the Texas Music Museum, organized by Dave Polacheck.

Dave grew up in a family where folk music was played regularly, and he took up the banjo at an early age. His childhood was split between New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco, so Dave's been around!

Dave moved to Texas in the early 1970's, and has fond memories of the early days of the Austin music scene, listening to Janis Joplin, John Clay and the Lost

Austin Band, and many others. It's Dave's intention to keep the spirit of those days alive with a diverse, all-inclusive jam.

At the March, 2017 Stone Soup Jam, one could hear fiddle tunes, unaccompanied ballad singing, blues music, old country songs, and other traditional genres. The March gathering was a particularly special event; Dave Polacheck celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, surround by family and friends!

This fine jam takes place on the third Sunday of the month at the Texas Music Museum, 1009 E 11th St, Austin, TX 78702; things get rolling around 2:00 PM!

[Click here to see more photos of The Stone Soup Jam!](#)

## ***2017 Austin String Band Festival Preview***

The Austin String Band Festival is one of the best-kept secrets in Texas, a music festival with small crowds, a lovely natural setting and close-in parking.

Come discover the Austin String Band Festival out at Camp Ben McCulloch (right by the Salt Lick) in Driftwood.TX. Dance all night on Friday, then attend hands-on music and dance workshops under the trees early on Saturday, then kick back for a day and night of nonstop fiddles, banjos and guitars as more than two dozen bands take the stage. Sunday wraps it up with a gospel jam. Camping at its finest along Onion Creek. October 20 - 22.



The campground jamming at the ASBF is some of the best to be found anywhere, as demonstrated by these four AFTM stalwarts!

Go to the next page to see this year's featured performers.



## Molsky's Mountain Drifters

**Introducing Bruce Molsky's brand new trio with Allison de Groot and Stash Wyslouch - Tradition steeped in possibility.**

Molsky's Mountain Drifters packs a punch with three of the most captivating performers in the most recent generation of Old-Time and American Roots music. The band features Bruce Molsky, (Grammy nominated, revered Old-Time music ambassador and Berklee College of Music Visiting Scholar) along with guitar genre bender Stash Wyslouch (of the Deadly Gentlemen) on guitar and vocals and master of the clawhammer banjo,

Allison de Groot (of The Goodbye Girls). These striking musicians have come together for a new sound within the traditional music genre through their audacious approach. "I was looking for a new voice," says Molsky, "a new avenue of expression using old time mountain music as the jumping-off point, but not being constrained by hard core traditionalism. Allison and Stash are showing me the way, just where the music is headed, in directions I never would have imagined when I started my own journey into the mountains a long time ago."



## ***Austin area favorites Spencer and Rains***

**Tricia Spencer** is a Kansas fiddler who grew up learning the tradition of old time music from her Grandparents.

**Howard Rains** is a native Texas artist and a fourth generation fiddler.

Together, **Spencer & Rains** have performed and taught nationally and internationally, preserving and building upon the traditions of their region. The husband and wife duo are known for their twin

fiddle harmony, which is a product of the influence of midwestern Scandinavian fiddlers Tricia heard as a child. At the same time, Howard's distinct repertoire reintroduces listeners to the pre-contest styles of Texas fiddling. That same sense of harmony is in their vocals, as well, which they pull from all manner of American folk music. Both multi-instrumentalists, they are steeped in tradition and are dedicated to the preservation, performance, and teaching of old time music.



## "Rabbit" Sanchez and Lorenzo Martinez

Ramon "Rabbit" Sanchez (bajo sexto) and Lorenzo Martinez (accordion) are legendary musicians as well as some of the most versatile to come out of the conjunto homeland of South Texas. Together they have forged a sound that combines old school traditional conjunto with a progressive sensibility.

Rodney Clay Sutton is a dance performer and teacher of Appalachian step dance – both flatfoot and clogging. He calls square dances and contra dances, and is a storyteller and ballad singer. Rodney offers workshops, lectures, and demonstrations catered for a range of age groups, including youth, seniors, and corporate gatherings. He is also a concert and festival producer, emcee, and stage manager.



## Rodney Sutton

## Missy Beth and The Morning Afters



Beth Chrisman steps away from her usual role as side player, picks up the guitar and sings center stage, mixing in her original songs with gems from her favorite songwriters and heroes (Hazel Dickens, Loretta Lynn, Wanda Jackson, Ola Belle Reed).

**The Morning Afters** are a rotating crew of Austin's finest country pickers, will lay down a collection of lonesome honkytonk and rockin oldtime tunes sure to get your feet on the dance floor.



## The Barn Owls, with Sharon Isaac, Caller

The Barn Owls are an oldtime string band specializing in having a good time. Fiddler Trent Shepherd grew up in Austin but his family roots are in West Virginia. He and bassist Brink Melton are alumni of the Onion Creek Crawdaddies, a beergrass band that had a large and loyal following for several years. Guitarist Joe Dobbs is a librarian by day and tune collector all the time. Some of the band's more unusual tunes were unearthed by Joe. Banjoist Jerry Hagins has been on the Austin scene for quite a while, teaching banjo and playing in any band that will have him. Square dances are a Barn Owls specialty, and they'll be teaming up with Kentucky-raised dance caller Sharon Issac.

## ***How many strings on Dave's banjo?***



### ***Clawhammer Picking on a Seven String Banjo***

by David Polacheck

I've been playing clawhammer style banjo for more than fifty years, and over that time, I have often been frustrated by the fact that many tunes require notes that are below the customary low note on the fourth string of D or C. Of course, there are tunings that tak

e the fourth string down to a lower note, but this is often inconvenient and can make difficulties in left hand fingering for some tunes. The option of playing the whole piece or low

section an octave higher was unsatisfying to me because I liked the low pitch sound.

Last year, I was offered a chance to "banjo sit" a six string banjo by Mike Ramsey. Now this was not a guitar banjo, but basically a five string banjo, but basically a five string banjo with an extra bass string between the standard fourth and fifth. Gold Tone has made some instruments like this under the model name "LoJo".

I tuned the extra bass string initially to a G an octave below the third string in standard G tuning and tried it out. Since I now had a string an octave below the fiddlers' fourth string in standard tuning, it gave me the option of playing the low notes for pieces like "Wild Rose of the Mountain", "Frosty Morning" and "Loftus Jones". It also gave me a nice low pitched sound on chords.

This got me to thinking about what a seven string banjo could provide in picking possibilities, since an extra bass string below the low G I was now playing, pitched an octave below the standard fourth string would allow me to play many tunes an octave lower than the standard way of playing them. This creates the possibility of playing tunes in the cello banjo range, like a Gold Tone CEB-5, but also having the standard banjo range and way of approaching the tune. The extra low bass string would also enhance the sounds of chords used for emphasis during the rendition.

I really like playing a banjo with a Whyte Laydie tone ring, and since I knew that Gold Tone made a version of this design, I consulted with Wayne Rogers about modifying one of their 12 string guitar banjos (the GT 1200) by regrooving the nut to accept seven strings. Only seven of the twelve tuning machines were used although all twelve remain in place. (I

requested that they switch out the rim for their version of the Whyte Laydie style tone ring from the MM-150 model.) They also modified the bridge and I doubled up on two of the posts on the tailpiece. The YouTube videos I subsequently made show how well the repurposing worked out. One unusual feature of this design is the drone or thumb string which has the same scale length as the other strings instead of the traditional shorter length terminating in a "fifth string peg". To bring the pitch of the drone string to its normal note, I used detachable fifth string capos of various designs, ultimately settling on having model railroad spikes installed. Now I don't have to worry about sticking my thumb on the short end of the thumb string.

Two other aftermarket changes included a seven string tailpiece from Thomas Saffell's Infinity banjos and a custom made bridge by Bart Veerman allowing for the radiused fingerboard of the neck. I also chose to use a Shubb twelve string guitar capo, which works well. I am very happy with the results, especially at the price, considerably lower than a "from scratch" instrument from a small shop banjo maker would have been.

There are at least two other makers of this type of instrument that I know of\*, and it is also being used for classical style (Michael Nix has a nylon string seven string instrument,

which you can view on YouTube) as well as bluegrass style picking.

The additional sounds and ways of playing the traditional songs and tunes I love has made me an enthusiastic fan of the modern seven string banjo!

(Tunings I have used include gDGDGBD, gDGDGBbD, gDGDGCD, aDADF#AD, aDADFAD, gCGCGBD and gCGCGCD.)

\*Henning Von Ploetz of Germany and Thomas Saffell's Infinity Banjos from Tennessee. These instruments both feature a traditional short drone string design.



The Reel Times is published quarterly by the Austin Friends of Traditional Music, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt Texas nonprofit corporation. Contributions are deductible as charitable and educational donations.

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