

HVBA Jam Session

2nd Wednesday of each month

*Pirate Canoe Club
Poughkeepsie, NY*

*Slow Jam starts at 6PM
Jam ends at 10 PM*



Call (845) 691-6784 for details or directions

WANTED

Your editor seeks Jamboree issues Number 8 and 10 to complete the collection in the HVBA archives. We'll provide a postage paid envelope, make copies and return the newsletters to you unscathed.

Can you help? Call (845) 691-6784 or email hvbluegrass@aol.com

WinterGrass for Farmers

with Vassar Clements & Northern Lights

February 15, 2003
8 PM
at The Bardavon
Poughkeepsie NY

details inside



See flyer insert for ticket order form
Proceeds benefit Hudson Valley Harvest
revolving loan program for farmers

Check the label for your expiration date. If it is past, please pay \$10 annual membership to keep receiving Jamboree.



Hudson Valley Bluegrass Association
106 Pancake Hollow Road
Highland, NY 12528



Jamboree

The Hudson Valley Bluegrass Association

WINTER 2003

online at HVBluegrass.org

Number 31

WinterGrass for Farmers Vassar Clements & Northern Lights

Jeff Anzevino

The HVBA, Cornell Cooperative Extension Service and Scenic Hudson have teamed up to promote The Bardavon's February 15 show featuring Vassar Clements and Northern Lights. The Bardavon has graciously agreed to donate \$5 for each ticket sold through the HVBA to Cornell Cooperative Extension Service's revolving loan program to assist local farmers (see page 3).

Kate Chebarek, former Agricultural Field Crop Specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension, pitched the idea to the HVBA at last year's Winter Fun-raiser. Although Kate has moved on, her idea lives on and, with your help, this unique program will provide an opportunity to enjoy some first-class bluegrass music while showing your appreciation for local farmers, many of whom provide the food on our tables.

In order to ensure that a donation to the fund is made, you must purchase your tickets using the coupon found on the flyer enclosed in this newsletter. Tickets are \$24.50 for the show, which begins at 8 PM.

The HVBA hopes that the success of our WinterGrass for Farmers program will spawn more ambitious Farm Aid-type benefits shows and festivals in the future.

The Story of Vassar's Fiddle

Many of Vassar's fans have inquired about the history of his fiddle. After months of research some facts



pertaining to the builder of the violin and its age remain a mystery.

Several reliable sources speculate that the instrument was built by the famous violinmaker, Gaspar Duiffoprugcar in the mid to late 1500s. It is reasonably certain that the fiddle was built by Duiffoprugcar or is an excellent copy of the original.

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NOTICE: Effective immediately the HVBA Jam will be held on the 2nd Wednesday of Each Month. \$3 donation is appreciated.

Message from the President Good things in store!

As we begin our 9th year serving the Hudson Valley's bluegrass community, the Board of Directors has good things in store for you.

First, our partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension Service, Scenic Hudson and The Bardavon has resulted in our WinterGrass for Farmers program, which will raise money to help local farmers.

Our jam, which started on June 22, 1995 continues at the Pirate Canoe Club in Poughkeepsie, but on a different date: the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Thanks to Stephen Hirsch, who suggested a "Slow Jam" for beginners. We have had two Slow Jams so far and they have proved quite popular. The Slow Jam starts at 6PM.

We hope to bolster our Board of Directors and increase our membership, which has levelled off at about 175.

We will continue to hold Bluegrass Between the Bridges at Waryas Park, in association with The Bardavon's Hudson River Arts Festival, which is scheduled for September 20, 2003.

I am pleased to be back at the helm of the organization you and I started at the Rhinecliff Hotel in the Fall of 1994. Please feel free to call or write with any suggestions about how the HVBA can better serve you.

Jeffrey Anzevino,
HVBA President

Sign me up! in the Hudson Valley Bluegrass Association

Send to: Joyce Cullen, 375 Peekskill Hollow Road, Putnam Valley, NY 10579

Enclosed is \$10 for new membership / renewal

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____

Hudson Valley Bluegrass Association *a 501 (c) 3 not for profit arts and educational organization*

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Winter Summer Spring and Fall*

Jeffrey Anzevino, Editor

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Kaukonen's Blue Country at The Turning Point, Piermont, NY 7:30 & 10 PM

Jan 21: Ralph Stanley at McCarter Theater, Princeton, NJ

Jan 22: Barebones & Wildflowers at The Beech Tree Grill, Poughkeepsie, NY 8-11 PM (845) 471-7279

Jan 25: Barebones & Wildflowers at Hob Nobbin' North, Hyde Park, NY 10 PM, (845) 454-8400

Jan 25: Grass Routes at The Sounding Board Coffeehouse, Universalist Church of West Hartford, W. Hartford, CT (860) 632-7547

Jan 26: Steve Palmer at The Beech Tree Grill, Poughkeepsie, NY Noon-3 PM (845) 471-7279

Jan 26: Jamming at Cato - 11am to 4pm, \$2.00 donation - food available, Cato, NY www.cnyba.com

Feb 1: Big Apple'achia at Willie's Steak House Manchester, CT

Feb 6: Heinzevino! at Gadaletto's Seafood Restaurant, New Paltz, NY 6PM (845) 255-1717

Feb 9: Del McCoury Band at Mohegan Sun Casino, Uncasville, CT

Feb 14-16: The 18th Joe Val Bluegrass Festival with the Del McCoury Band, Mountain Heart, Laurie Lewis, Dale Ann Bradley, Open Road, True Blue, Buddy Merriam & Back Roads Bluegrass, Mike Burns & North Country, many more, www.bbu.org

Feb 15: WinterGrass for Farmers with Vassar Clements & Northern Lights at The Bardavon. Buy tickets through HVBA to benefit HV farmers hvbbluegrass.org or (845) 691-6784

Feb 16: Big Apple'achia at CT River Eagle Festival, Essex, CT (860) 767-2848

Feb 20: Heinzevino at Gadaletto's Seafood Restaurant, New Paltz, NY 6PM (845) 255-1717

Feb 23: All-Star Jamboree at Orchard Vali Golf Club, www.cnyba.com

March 28: Sam Bush Band at the Intermedia Arts Center in Huntington, NY

Mar 8: Jay Ungar & Molly Mason, College of Staten Island/Staten Island, NY 718/982-ARTS

Mar 9: "Lizards, Lights & Clements" Austin Lounge Lizards, Northern Lights & Vassar Clements at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy, NY (518) 273-0038 www.troymusicchall.com

Mar 14: The James King Band at The Emelin Theater, Mamaroneck, NY 8 PM Free picking party from 6:30-8pm (914) 698-0098 \$24

Mar 23: Jamming at Cato - 11am to 4pm, \$2.00 donation - food available, www.cnyba.com

Mar 27: Alison Brown & Sam Bush - John Harms Center, John Harms Center, 30 N. Van Brunt St., Englewood, N. J. 07630 201-567-3600 www.johnharms.org

Mar 28: Peter Rowan - Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy NY. (518) 273-0038 www.troymusicchall.com

Apr 4: Dry Branch Fire Squad at The Emelin Theater, Mamaroneck, NY 8 PM Free picking party from 6:30-8pm (914) 698-0098 \$24

Apr 4: Tim O'Brien - Concerts in The Round, Historic Park Church, 208 W Gray St., Elmira, N.Y. 14903

Apr 5: The Homegrown String Band, Public Library/White Plains, 2:30 PM (914) 422-1480

Apr 27: CYNBA Jamboree - place to be announced, www.cnyba.com

May 16: Lynn Morris Band at The Emelin Theater, Mamaroneck, NY 8 PM Free picking party from 6:30-8pm (914) 698-0098 \$24

May 23-26: Flying Fingers Jam at Apple Festival grounds, www.cnyba.com

May 24: Old & In The Grey featuring David Grisman, Peter Rowan, Vassar Clements & Herb Pedersen at The Stone Pony, Asbury Park, NJ (609) 520-8383 or (732) 502-0600 or www.stoneponyonline.com

May 30 & 31: Vassar Clements & Peter Rowan, Vassar Clements with Buddy Cage & The Zen Tricksters at Tribeca Blues, NYC (212) 766-1070 or www.amdmusic.com

HVBA Exchange

1997 Martin Custom D-28. Shaved Braces. Custom made in factory by Martin luthier. Incredible sound. Mint condition. HSC. \$1800.

1999 Fender Electric Jazz Precision Bass. Brand new. Mint Condition. Hard shell case. With 12" Fender Jazzman Amp. \$1000.

Call (845) 255-9106

Your classified ad here. Listings only \$5. Inquire within.

Music and Dance Scene

MAD Scene is provided as a service to HVBA members and bands. Play it safe! Call before you go.

List your event by sending pertinent details to hvbluegrass@aol.com

Ongoing Jams, Dances, Gigs etc.

2nd Wednesday of each month: HVBA Jam at Pirate Canoe Club, Poughkeepsie, NY 6-10 PM (845) 691-6784 or (914) 276-2239

Every Friday: Jammin' at the Legion Hall, Marcellus, NY; (315) 673-2329 or 1844

Every Monday: Bluegrass night at The Parkside Lounge, NYC

Last Monday of each month: Orrin Star at The Parkside Lounge, NYC

Every Monday: The Alphabet City Opry at The Parkside Lounge, Houston St. betw. Ave A & B in Manhattan; 9 PM

Every Monday: Irish Folk Session at The Baggott Inn, Manhattan

Every Monday: Riverbank Banjo Band, Banta's Steak 'n Stein, Poughkeepsie, NY

2nd Tuesday of Each Month: North East Bluegrass Jam, Malt River Brewing Co., Latham NY, 8 PM, (518) 489-2369

4rd Tuesday of Each Month: Jam at Lark Tavern, Albany, NY (518) 489-2369

Every Wednesday: Minetta Creek Band, Carpos, New York City (212) 353-2889

Every Wednesday: Bluegrass & Good Times Jam with host The Sheriff at The Baggott Inn, Manhattan 9 PM

2nd & 4th Wednesday: Warren Academy, Warrren, CT 7 PM (201) 868-7659

Every other Thursday: Heinzevino! at Gadaletto's Seafood, New Paltz, NY 6-9 PM (845) 255-1717 691-6784

1st Friday of Every Month: North Country Music's Bluegrass Jam, St. Luke's Church. (914) 276-2239

1st Friday: Fais Do Do with Dr. Romo and the Cajun Swing Orchestra, Woodstock Community Center, Woodstock, NY 8 PM (845) 658-3392

1st Saturday of Every Month: Jam hosted by Roger Sprung, United Methodist Church, Sandy Hook, CT (203) 426-5243 (NOT IN JULY OR AUGUST)

1st Saturday of Every Month: Open Mic/

Bluegrass/Folk Jam; Unitarian Church; Rock Tavern, NY (845) 496-0771

1st Saturday of Every Month: Contra Dance at St. Philips Church Parish House, Route 9D, Garrison, NY (845) 265-4011, 265-7201, 265-0032

2nd Saturday of Every Month: Walkabout Clearwater, Katonah, NY (845) 242-0374

3rd Sat. of Every Month: Restoration Coffee House Open Mic; Old Dutch Reformed Church, Bloomingburg, NY; 7 PM; (845) 647-6491

3rd Saturday of Every Month: Hudson Valley Folk Guild Poughkeepsie Chapter, (845) 297-6372

Every Other Saturday: (Old Time only!!) Thady Con's Pub NYC; (212) 688-9700

Every Sunday: Woodstock Jam at Catskill Mtn Pizza 1PM (845) 679-7969

Every Sunday: Bluegrass Session with Tom Hanway at Paddy O'Reilly's Bar, 4 PM; NYC (718) 884-5721

Every Sunday: Club 9C in Manhattan 5 PM - ???; (212)-358-0048

4th Sunday: Finger Lakes Bluegrass Monthly Jam 2-8 Pm at the Ontario County Arts Council, Canandaigua, NY (716) 396-0087 or 924-3117

More Music!!

Jan 11: Lynn Morris Band at the Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, MA, www.bbu.org

Jan 11: Grass Routes at South Windsor Public Library, S. Windsor, CT (860) 644-1541

Jan 11: Amy Gallatin at CT Audubon Coffeeshouse, Glastonbury, CT (860) 633-8402

Jan 17: Rani Arbo & Daisy Mayhem, Rosendale Cafe, Rosendale NY (914) 658-9048

Jan 18: Tony Trischka w/Jorma Kaukonen's Blue Country at Heart Seabury Center, Westport, CT (203) 222-7070

Jan 18: Banjo Dan & The Mid-Nite Plowboys, Chandler Music Hall, Randolph, VT

Jan 21 & 22: Tony Trischka w/Jorma

Vassar's Fiddle

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Vassar's fiddle is believed to be over three hundred years old however, this cannot be proved beyond a shadow of doubt. In any event, the fiddle was probably built prior to the 17th century.

The carvings and other markings on Vassar's fiddle closely resemble a fiddle once owned by Prince Youssouпов, a distinguished Russian amateur violinist. The description of the Prince's fiddle, taken from the Universal Dictionary of Fiddles, details a carving of the sculptured head of a 50 year old Duiffoprugcar with a thick mustache and beard, deep set eyes, slightly aquiline nose, wrinkled forehead, and frill or collar worn during the period, in lieu of the standard scroll.

The triangular corners decorated by double-purfling inlays resemble a leaf. Each of the fiddles built by Duiffoprugcar displayed magnificent art work on the back, and Vassar's fiddle is no exception. The back has a painting of Sappho holding a lute.

Both sides of the fiddle contain lettering which remains a mystery, but research is

still underway to determine its message.

The fiddle has been handed down through the hands of numerous musical legends. In the early 1970s Vassar was working with John Hartford who acquired the fiddle and let Vassar use it. At a later time John called Vassar and gave him the fiddle as a Christmas gift.

Vassar cherishes the fiddle and when his fingers and bow touch the strings, the sound heard is like none other. The fusion of Vassar and this fine instrument have entertained fans around the globe.

Source: www.vassarlements.com



Hudson Valley Harvest Agricultural revolving loan program

Proceeds from the Vassar Clements & Northern Lights concert will contribute to The Hudson Valley Harvest Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund. Established in 2002, the fund is designed to promote the further development of agricultural businesses in the Hudson Valley by means of moderate interest loans.

Five types of loans are available for several purposes: constructing or renovating farm buildings, purchasing equipment or livestock,

financing annual operating expenses for seed, fertilizer, planting and harvesting activities, and to build, equip and operate facilities to process agricultural products.

You can support the Hudson Valley Harvest Revolving Loan Fund by purchasing your tickets to the Vassar Clements & Northern Lights show through the coupon found on the flyer inserted in this newsletter, or call (845) 691-6784 for details.

News Briefs

HVBA Election

At the HVBA's annual meeting on November 20, HVBA Founder and Editor of Jamboree Jeffrey Anzevino was elected as President. Chris Scheu was re-elected a Vice President and Cathy Granata was elected Secretary, replacing Kat Mills, who migrated south to join husband Nick at Graduate School.

Thanks to outgoing prez Mike Burns, who reports that he is keeping busy building a house for his family and looks forward to playing with his band, North Country, at the Joe Val Bluegrass Festival February 14-16.

Winter Fun-raiser?

The HVBA Board is searching for a new location for our Winter Fun-raiser. This event usually showcases HVBA bands and is our primary fundraiser for Bluegrass Between The Bridges. Any bands interested in playing? If so, contact us at (845) 691-6784 or hvbluegrass@aol.com

Newsletter Submissions Sought

Your friendly editor reminds all readers that we welcome letters, articles, gig listings, band news etc. This is, after all, your newsletter. Send submissions to hvbluegrass@aol.com.

Commodore Evanoski

Longtime HVBA member Walt Evanoski has been elected Commodore of the Pirate Canoe Club. Walt also sponsors our jam session there, the date of which has been moved to the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Congratulations Walt.

Mailing Label Snafu

Our apologies to those whose labels incorrectly indicated that they were behind in their HVBA dues. We have identified the problem, which has been fixed. Thank you for your understanding.

Too Blue News

Too Blue's debut CD (reviewed in Jamboree 30) "A Little On the Blue Side" is getting rave reviews. Bluegrass Unlimited calls it "a class production from a contemporary bluegrass band that knows how to put swing into their bluegrass." Flatpicking magazine's Dave McCarty raves: "Clever songs, good singing, strong instrumentals and great flatpicking in a well-recorded package." Also, "Flatpicking 2002", a Flatpicking's sampler CD, includes *Three Rivers* by Too Blue, as well as tracks by David Grier, Kenny Smith, Wyatt Rice, and other top players. For more info go to: <http://www.toobluemusic.com>.

The Natural Way to Music

Bill Keith and Jim D'Ville have authored *The Natural Way to Music*, a 65-page book (available with optional video/CD ROM designed to demystify music theory. No previous musical training is necessary to unlock the mysteries" of music theory. The book starts with the relationship between various tones and builds upon the brain's ability to process these tones. Look for a complete review in the Spring edition of Jamboree. The book can be ordered through <http://www.naturalwaymusic.com>



Congratulations Rachel

Rachel Handman, noted violinist and fiddler/vocalist in Barebones & Wildflowers took 2nd Place in the Championship Division of the New England Fiddle Contest. We've all been well acquainted with Rachel's outstanding fiddling for quite some time. Good to see her struttin' her stuff in Hartford! Way to go!

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Suite for Bluegrass Banjo Ben Freed banjoben music

Again Ben Freed has released a CD and again we are not disappointed. In fact, *Suite for Bluegrass Banjo* follows on the heels of *Speed of Sound* (2000) demonstrating why Ben is one of the region's top acoustic composers and musicians.

Like *Speed of Sound* (see Jamboree 26) *Suite for Bluegrass Banjo* contains all instrumentals, each and every one composed by Freed, who plays banjo, dobro, pedal steel and bass on this CD. Several musicians make return appearances here: Kenny Kosak (fiddle), Barry Mitterhoff & Wayne Fugate (mandolin), and Jon Sholle (electric guitar). Other guest artists include Mike Sasano (mandolin), Rushad Eggleston (cello), Ethan Kende, Mark Murphy and Jim Whitney (bass), and Charlie Shaw (percussion).

Yes, this recording includes some electric guitar and percussion, but don't let that deter you. The tunes on this CD are beautifully arranged, well produced, fresh, clean and crisp. Each tune flows into the next as one would expect in a "suite" of music.

You'll find twin fiddling of the finest caliber, and intricately woven banjo-cello riffs on *Unhinged*. *Bucktail Jig* immediately grabbed my ear. It starts out as a fiddle/banjo old-time duet and quickly evolves into a ripping jam with Freed laying down two hot dobro solos.

Sholl chicken picks sweet solos on *Skunked* and *Hammerhead*. Freed shifts gear with *Kaddish*, a thoughtful contemplative piece.

After the scorching *Cruise Control*, Ben brings us back to reality with another instrumental ballad, *Nine Below*. With barrages of banjo riffs and an all-star supporting cast, Ben whips up melody, harmony and rhythm in a feast for our ears.



Unhinged
The Keeper
Bucktail Jig
The Sweet Spot
Skunked
Kaddish
Hammerhead
Cruise Control
Nine Below
Hook Line & Sinker
Road Hog
Live Bait

Freed's pedal steel shines on the bouncy *Road Hog*. The CD's closer, begins with a children's chorus shouting "Live Bait," then casts off as a modern yet old-timey fiddley-banjoing barn burner.

Think I'm just easily impressed? Don't take my word for it. Banjo wizard Tony Trischka calls this CD "one blast of a banjo romp filled with surprises and constant satisfactions." He would know.

And I agree. This CD is chock full of the kinds of textures that first attracted me to bluegrass music nearly 20 years ago.

You can order *Suite for Bluegrass Banjo* (or *Speed of Sound*) from Ben's website www.banjoben.com. Or write to him at 45 Evergreen Row, Armonk, NY 10504 or email benfreed@aol.com.

Bound for Glory

The Glory Bound Band

The Glory Bound Band is a Port Jervis-based group that I had the good fortune to catch at the Willow Creek Bluegrass Festival. The band features the fiddling of Becky Miedema and Jim Ryan on mandolin. Guitar work is handled by Joe Miedema and Carl Decker.

Bound for Glory is a collection of 14 gospel songs characterized by a driving rhythm guitar and vocal harmonies. The tunes are peppered with mandolin backup. Some of the cuts are quite familiar; others are not so.

The CD demonstrates the classic bluegrass sound of mandolin and fiddle. *In the Garden*, *Gathering Flowers* (one of my favorites!), and *Lord Light a Candle for Me* are three waltzes included on the CD.

Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb? features round singing by Becky Miedema and another band member. One thing that might have improved this CD would be some better liner notes, including contact information about how to purchase it!

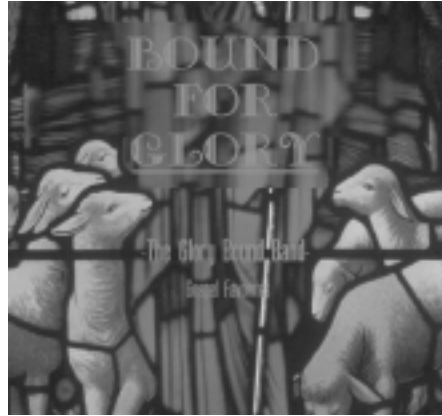
Nevertheless, this CD has some of my favorite chestnuts: *Amazing Grace*, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, *Keep On The Sunny Side*, *I Saw the Light*, and *Life Is Like a Mountain Railroad*.

The Glory Bound Band should be proud of this effort, which will appeal to bluegrass fans and particularly to lovers of Gospel music.

News Briefs

Beecher Kirby 1911-2002

Beecher Ray Kirby -- better known as "Bashful Brother Oswald" — died on October 17, 2002, also of cancer. He was 90. "Brother Oswald" was an innovator of the dobro, or resophonic guitar, having taken up the instrument in 1929, just two years after its invention. He was a member of Roy Acuff's



Greener Pastures
Working the Road to Glory
Are You Washed in the
Blood of the Lamb
In the Garden
Build Me a Cabin in
Glory Land
Gathering Flowers
Life is Like a Mountain
Railroad
Bound for Glory
I Saw the Light
Lord, Light a Candle for Me
Keep on the Sunny Side
Meeting in the Air
Will the Circle Be
Unbroken?
Amazing Grace

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Smoky Mountain Boys from 1936 until Acuff's death in 1992. Oswald released solo recordings in the 1960s and recorded on the landmark 1972 album *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. 🎸

J's Slow Jam Notes

Hurray for the Slow Jam! My only problem with this is that I didn't think of it. When I was taking guitar lessons as a youngster (I had nine months worth), I asked my teacher to show me how to play a song. He told me "no" and said that he would teach me how to play *guitar*, then I could play any song I wanted to. I didn't like that answer then (I was 12 years old) but later, much later his words came back to me.

Between 1970 and 1994 I did little playing. In '88 I met a guy who played quite well and it inspired me to go to work on my playing. My basic guitar skills enabled me to get right back into it. I had the basics of string names and chord shapes and scales. But, if someone asked me to play a pentatonic scale, I couldn't.

I do know, however, that that my solos, in part are drawn from that scale and others. I am not specifically a Bluegrass player but, I can jam with these tunes because of my basic knowledge of guitar and music. I'm no expert, I just love playing music and this is what keeps me playing it. My point is that if you learn scales and runs and phrases as well as chords you'll begin to recognize them and you can apply them to the songs you play, what ever your instrument is.

There are the purists who will argue the point that a song must be played *right* but, who is to say what right is? We are talking about *jamming* here not sitting in with Ricky Skaggs' band in concert.

Here are two things I'll leave you with. First, *lighten up!* You're probably playing because you like to not because it will pay the bills and put your kids through school. Have fun, take chances. If

what you play doesn't sound so great then don't play that phrase again, try something else.

I find that most accomplished players will be happy to show you a lick or a trick if you ask them. Remember, they played and

sounded just like you once upon a time. So if you hear a lick you like don't be afraid to ask how it's done. They can only tell you "no" and I haven't seen too much of that.

Second, if each player at the Slow Jam would pick a song and work on leading it (even if all you know is the chords and/or the lead line) we'll have songs to play. If ten folks do this, we'll have ten songs to choose from and we don't have to waste any time trying to decide what to play. As time goes on, we will develop a set of songs we can all have lots of fun with. So fear not and keep playing! 'Til next time. 🎸

Editor's Note: Thanks to "J", a first time contributor to Jamboree. "J" is an accomplished musician and has been a regular at the HVBA jam for quite some time.

**HVBA Jam now held on the
2nd Wednesday of each month.**



Jammers Gary DiGiovanni and Pat Dingess

Northern Lights: A History

New England has long been a hotbed of bluegrass music, generating traditional bands like Traver Hollow, Joe Val & the New England Bluegrass Boys, Southern Rail, White Mountain Bluegrass, and Green Mountain Bluegrass. But Northern Lights has been recognized as the premier progressive "northern" scene for quite some time.

Their two most recent recordings — *Another Sleepless Night* (2001), *Three August Nights* (2000) — are on the PRIME CD label. In addition, guitarist Bill Henry just released his first CD, *Red Sky* in June 2002 on OMS Records. The CD boasts a mix of bluegrass and Irish fiddle tunes, folk, swing, jazz and even a little country. Joining Bill are special guests Vassar Clements, Sam Bush, Tim O'Brien, Jonathan Edwards, as well as bandmates from Northern Lights.

Present members of the band include founder Taylor Armerding (mandolin/lead & harmony vocals), Bill Henry (guitar/lead & harmony vocals), Dave Dick (banjo, guitar, mandolin/harmony vocals) and John Daniel (bass/lead & harmony vocals).

Northern Lights' three albums on the Flying Fish Label — *Wrong Highway Blues* (1994), *Can't Buy Your Way* (1992), and *Take You to the Sky* (1990) — all attained Top 10 status. In all Northern Lights has recorded nine albums, dating back to their self-titled debut on the Renovah label in 1976, shortly after they were "discovered" at the Berkshire Mountain Festival, precursor of Winterhawk and Grey Fox.

The band was first formed the year before, in late 1975, when three members of a good-time bar band called How Banks Fail (Dan Marcus, Marty Sachs, and Bob Emery) hooked up with Taylor Armerding, to create a band with a progressive sound. When considering a name, they consciously shunned



Northern Lights

associations with "The South," and avoided traditional-sounding names. Members were looking for a moniker that was not rural, yet not exactly urban, either. Further, they did not want to suggest that their repertoire would focus on southern chestnuts like "Rocky Top," "Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms," "Pig in a Pen" and little else. No one seems to recall came up with "Northern Lights," but the name has stuck over all these ears.

A few months later, in December, the metamorphosis was complete, when the band had its "coming out" gig, opening for Lester Flatt and the Nashville Grass at a show for the Boston Area Friends of Bluegrass and Old-Time Country Music.

But by September 1977, the band dissolved when two band members left. Without skipping a beat, Armerding and Emery formed a new group, String Fever, which lasted until early 1981.

In late 1982, Northern Lights re-formed, after banjo prodigy Alison Brown, then a sophomore at Harvard, called Armerding and asked to do some part-time playing. Armerding had recently met guitarist Bill

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News Briefs

Wild Billy Banjo Reports

Thanks to Wild Billy Banjo played banjo (while Abe Lincoln sang bass) at the dedication of the Upper Delaware Valley Scenic Byway. Wild Billy ran in the 98th Assembly District race, stumping with his banjo at parades and picnics. Eyewitness News Channel 7 in NYC also caught him on film playing banjo at the Sarah Huges Parade in Great Neck. "That," says Bill, "was my five second claim to fame."

Passings

Jim McReynolds 1927-2002

Guitarist and tenor singer Jim McReynolds died on New Years' Eve after a bout with

Northern Lights

contributed his unique vocal style to *Winterhawk*.

Fiddling great Vassar Clements connected with Northern Lights in the summer of 1990, fiddling with the band at the Rochester Bluegrass Festival (NY) and several times thereafter.

Northern Lights' second recording for Flying Fish, *Can't Buy Your Way*, was released in March, 1992. The album included eight original tunes by band members and guest fiddlers Stuart Duncan, Vassar Clements, and Matt Glaser, and spent eight months on the National Bluegrass Survey -- two months at #3.

Taylor Armerding's son Jake joined the band full time on fiddle in November 1992, at the tender age of 14, after two years of occasionally hopping on stage to provide fiddle for a number or two.

Northern Lights' third Flying Fish recording, *Wrong Highway Blues*, was released in February of 1994. This was the most eclectic album to date and included eight

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cancer. He was 75. His death comes just two weeks after the passing of his wife. Along with brother Jesse, both grandsons of Charles McReynolds, who in 1927 recorded a single on Victor with the Bull Mountain Moonshiners, they formed Jim & Jesse and The Virginians, one of the top bands in bluegrass for many years. Jim & Jesse and The Virginians maintained popularity through bluegrass' lean years in the late 50s and 60s by "going progressive," occasionally using electric guitar and drums and recording covers of pop tunes.

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original tunes and Jake's recording debut. It spent eight months on the bluegrass chart and was the band's third straight album to spend time in the TOP TEN, reaching #9.

The band signed with Red House Records in the spring of 1996 and released *Living In The City* in July. This one ran the gamut from gospel to folk to rock and included two originals from Jake Armerding, 18 at the time.

A career highlight occurred on June 20, 1998, when Northern Lights provided the music for the "Car Talk" 10th Anniversary Gala at Harborlights in Boston, which included, along with "Click & Clack" the Tappet Brothers, Dr. Joyce Brothers, the Smothers Brothers, and the Flying Karamazov Brothers. Also in 1998 Vassar Clements reconnected with the band, and their association continues. 🎸

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article borrows heavily from historic from Northern Lights' website: www.northernlightsband.com.

Vassar Clements

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emulate the big band sounds I heard on my fiddle."

Understandably, the form of jazz music created by virtuoso Vassar Clements is an amalgam of the diverse influences that have touched him throughout his career, but particularly his affinity for the jazz and swing music of his youth. Therefore, it is no surprise that even though early in his career, as he learned and developed bluegrass and country styles, he also gained respect as a jazz player.

Vassar's jazz is an uninhibited and unabashed expression of his approach to music, people and life in general. In the true tradition of all the great musical stylists, he has rejected the straitjacket of labeling. He performs with the depth of someone who has lived a lot, and as if he had been born prepared to play. His solos soar and glide gently over the rhythm in a manner reminiscent of saxophonist Lester Young's work with the great Count Basie Band decades ago.

This legendary artist can and will take his listener somewhere on an exploratory journey through time past, present and future. To say that Vassar Clements is a musicians' musician is an understatement. His modest demeanor and his professional approach to music has made him an idol to many in the entertainment industry. He is the quintessential American musician, being well versed in bluegrass, country, rock, blues, jazz and swing. His career presents a model that most musicians would gladly follow. 🎸

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article borrows heavily from information from Vassar Clements' website: www.vassarcléments.com

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WAMC Bluegrass Time.....Sundays 1 -3 PM
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.....Sat 6-8PM and Sun 3-5 PM
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The Tao of Tao...4th Weds of ea mo 9-10 PM
Thistle & Shamrock.....Sundays 7-8 PM

WHVW 950AM, Hyde Park, NY

Pirate Joe Radio Show.Weekdays3-6 PM
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WKZE 98.1 FM, Sharon, CT

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Plus, bluegrass mixed in with regular,
roots, and Americana programming

WTBQ 1110 AM, Florida, NY

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.....Sundays 9-midnight

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WHGL 100.3 FM, Troy, PA

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Northern Lights

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Henry, then living in Cambridge and attending the Berklee College of Music, and the three dragged Emery out of retirement to play bass. That group recorded the second Revonah album, *Before the Fire Comes Down*, about 18 months later, again including Emery originals, a few pop covers, and a couple of Brown's imaginative instrumentals.

In mid 1984 the band fragmented again when Brown graduated and moved back to California. But Mike Kropp, a friend of Henry's, came in as a replacement; and the group continued to play local clubs, regional festivals, and an increasing number of arts-in-the-parks shows. In late '86 the band traveled to Louisville, KY and finished third in the Best New Bluegrass Band competition hosted by Kentucky Fried Chicken. But by then, Emery had already announced his departure to spend more time at his "real job" as an administrator at Boston University.

It was about that time that the group launched its third recording effort, a self-produced cassette with seven originals songs. It was on the strength of that recording that the band began its move toward national recognition. *On the Edge* put Northern Lights on stage at the IBMA (International Bluegrass Music Association) "World of Bluegrass" Showcases in Owensboro, KY, where Flying Fish first expressed an interest in doing the group's next album. Two other elements contributed to the success of that weekend. Tony Rice was ill and unable to play at the Saturday evening Fan Fest; and of the 20 or so bands that would have liked to take his slot, Northern Lights got the nod. Then, minutes after the band left the stage, Peter Rowan asked Armerding to join him for the final set of the night, which also

included Bill Keith on banjo, Mark Schatz on bass, and Jerry Douglas on dobro. The Rowan connection expanded during 1989 and 1990, with numerous promoter requests for Peter Rowan/Northern Lights sets.

May, 1990, marked a major turning point in Northern Lights' career - the release of the band's first recording for Flying Fish, *Take You to The Sky*. Two Armerding originals, *Winterhawk* and *Northern Rail*, soared to the top five of Bluegrass Unlimited Magazine's National Bluegrass Survey within six months, with *Northern Rail* remaining on the chart through February, 1991. *Winterhawk* was one of the five songs

Northern Lights Discography

Another Sleepless Night (Prime CD, 2001)

Three August Nights (Prime CD, 2000)

Living In The City (Red House Records, 1996)

Wrong Highway Blues (Flying Fish Records, 1994)

Can't Buy Your Way (Flying Fish Records, 1992)

Take You to the Sky (Flying Fish Records, 1990)

On the Edge (1987)

Before the Fire Comes Down (Renovah, 1983)

Northern Lights (Renovah, 1976)

nominated for "Song of the Year" by the members of the IBMA. The three instrumentals were also originals - two by Henry and one by Kropp. Guest fiddlers included Grammy-Award winner Alison Krauss and Berklee String Department Chairman Matt Glaser (heard on the Ken Burns Civil War, and more recently Lewis and Clark TV series). Peter Rowan

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The King of Hillbilly Jazz

Vassar Clements' half century of music

Vassar Clements is one of the world's finest, and probably the world's most versatile fiddle players alive today. His career began at a very early age. His phenomenal ability to virtually play any kind of music (bluegrass, country, pop, rock, jazz and swing) has garnered him various awards, including five Grammy nominations and a track record that

involves multitudes of recording performances. His performing and recording experience has been so diverse, the list reads like "Who's Who" of fiddle players.

Vassar is more than just a fine musician. Many titles have been bestowed upon him. Some refer to him as a country "Isaac Stern", others a "Count Basie" fiddle player., and even the "Miles Davis" of bluegrass. The reason - perhaps is the fact that Vassar is a music philosopher who elects to play his thoughts on his instrument. He has simply taken the medium of music and used it to express his

feelings. He is a prolific composer of instrumentals and plays seven instruments. - violin, viola, cello, bass, mandolin, guitar and tenor banjo.

Vassar's career spans over fifty years. His association with Bill Monroe began when he was only 14 years old and still in school. He started with Bill as a regular Bluegrass Boy in 1949 and was with him through 1956. From

1957 to 1961 he performed with bluegrass stalwarts, Jim & Jesse McReynolds.

In 1962 he took leave from his music to pursue other interests, but returned to full time music when he decided to make Nashville his home in January 1967. Vassar did recording sessions and playing tenor

banjo in Nashville 's "Dixieland Landing" club until October 1969. He then started touring with Faron Young and doing occasional solo dates when time permitted.

In February 1971, he joined John Hartford,

himself with the legendary Earl Scruggs and the Earl Scruggs Revue.

During this time, one of the most important milestones in his career, was his participation on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 1972 Landmark album 'Will The

Circle Be Unbroken". This historical event was produced by William McEuen and featured an extravaganza of bluegrass, country and folk's greatest artists. It was the turning point that re-kindled Vassar's career and at the same time introduced

him to a much younger non-country audience.

Within a few short months, Vassar was recording and/or performing with Dicky Betts, Jerry Garcia, The Grateful Dead, The Allman Brothers, Linda Ronstadt, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, David Grisman, and Paul

McCartney.

In May 1973, The Classic, "Old & In The Way " album was recorded in San Francisco during a live performance. The Sales from this project have exceeded other albums of like kind, and has formed staunch cults that still exist after twenty three years.

Since 1973, when Vassar signed his first major label deal with Mercury/ Polygram records, his personal discography totals 27 albums ranging from country, waltzes, swing & jazz. Ironically, in 1992 he recorded his only straight bluegrass recording for Rounder Records entitled "Grass Routes".

His early experience growing with jazz and swing music left an indelible mark on his style. Vassar says "bands like Glen Miller, Les Brown, Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, and Artie Shaw were very popular when I was a kid. I always loved rhythm so I guess in the back of my mind the swing and jazz subconsciously comes out when I play, because when I was learning I was always trying to



Vassar Clements