



# Bluegrassin'

Volume 26 Issue 2

March—April, 2024

*The Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association is a non-profit association dedicated to promoting, preserving and sharing our love of bluegrass music in a spirit of family and friendship.*

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## Upcoming Bluegrass

**March 7:** Lochwood, Kettlehouse Brewery, Bonner, 5-7:30 pm

**March 9:** Lydia Conway and Release the Squirrels, Blacksmith Brewing, Stevensville, 6-8 pm

**March 18:** Jam Session, First Presbyterian Church (540 South Main Street), Kalispell, 6-8 pm

**March 23:** MRBA Winter Jam, Masonic Lodge, 126 E Broadway, Missoula. Doors open at 2 pm, Slow Jam at 3 pm, Potluck at 6 pm

**April 4:** Lydia Conway and Release the Squirrels, Buffalo Saloon, Bigfork, 6-9 pm

**April 5 & 6:** Glacier Fiddle Jam, Cornerstone Community Church, Kalispell <https://glacierfiddlefestival.blogspot.com/>

**April 9:** Sierra Hull (Miller Campbell & Lydia Conway open), Remington Bar, Whitefish <https://www.outriderspresent.com/>

**April 12:** Lochwood, Highlander Brewery, Missoula, 6-8 pm

**April 13:** MRBA Spring Festival, Neeley Center, Victor (see pg. 6)

### **Regular Jams & Events :**

**Tuesday jams in Whitefish:** North Valley Music School (432 Spokane Ave.) 6-7:30 pm. Call to RSVP—[\(406\) 862-8074](tel:4068628074)

**Billings: Weekly jams on Friday nights,** Yellowstone Bluegrass Association, Blue Creek Baptist Church, Billings, 7-9 pm?

**Montana Oldtime Fiddlers:** Third Sunday of the month, Buffalo Hill Terrace, Kalispell, 2:30-4:30 pm

**Missoula:** Bluegrass Night at the Old Post Pub, Mondays, 6-8:30 pm.

### **Notes:**

- 1) For ticket info & to confirm times, see venue websites
- 2) Send information about upcoming jams & band dates to newsletter editor

## President's Message

Howdy.

The Masonic Lodge monthly jams have been a hoot—3-5 different jam circles and lots of fun bluegrass pickin' with tasty potlucks. Matt Jolly and Jeff Campfield hosted a "slow jam" that was well attended and folks liked a bunch. The last winter jam is March 23. Doors open at 2 pm. Matt will host a "slow jam" at 3 pm, and the potluck will be at 6 pm.

The MRBA Bluegrass Festival is Saturday, April 13. We have 18 bands that will perform. We could use volunteers to help in the kitchen, at the door, and in many other areas, including the cleanup at the end of the Festival. Once again, Susan McCauley will be spearheading the kitchen. She asks folks who would like to do so to bring a dessert for resale.

We again received a generous \$1,000 donation from a member, so we will have free admission for MRBA members. Non-members are \$5, and children under 12 are free.

Bring on the pickin' and grinnin'... Mike

*P.S. Mark your calendars—the MRBA campout will be August 16,17,18.*

## Wanted—Volunteers for Spring Festival

Thanks to all the past and present volunteers who make the Spring Festival a success.

If anyone can devote a few hours to help out, it will be much appreciated.

As always, help is needed for setup/cleanup, ticket/merchandise sales, and kitchen duties. Contact Mike Conroy or Susan McCauley, or just volunteer the day of the festival. See you in Victor!

*Sometimes it only takes one song  
to bring back a thousand memories.  
(Quote: Unattributed)*

## Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association

PO Box 1306, Missoula, MT 59806

Website: [www.mtbluegrass.com](http://www.mtbluegrass.com) email: [mrba@mtbluegrass.com](mailto:mrba@mtbluegrass.com)

President - Mike Conroy, [mikevconroy@gmail.com](mailto:mikevconroy@gmail.com)

Vice President - Dallas Olson

Secretary/Treasurer - Anne Merrifield, [happypasture9@gmail.com](mailto:happypasture9@gmail.com),

Board Members - Tari Conroy, Kate McMahon, Steve Chapman, Jeff Campfield

Newsletter Editor - Kate McMahon, [kate@appcom.net](mailto:kate@appcom.net)

MRBA Webmaster - Phyllis Erck [mrba@mtbluegrass.com](mailto:mrba@mtbluegrass.com)

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**Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association**

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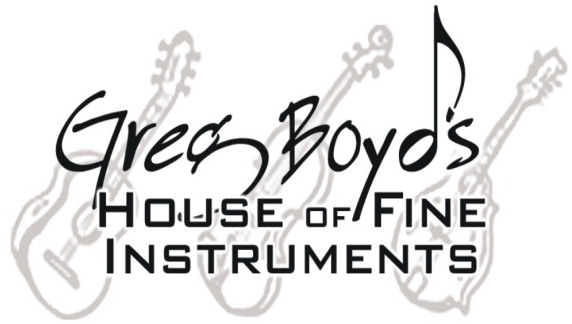
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Do you want the newsletter delivered electronically? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_

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

**MRBA Winter Jam Photos**



Furnace Room Jam



Table Jam



Jam Break for Good Eats



Corner Jam



Coat Closet Jam

## Interview with Mark Vosburgh—Slow Jammin’ (by Kate McMahon)

### **Tell us a little about how you got started in bluegrass.**

I played trumpet in high school, college, and as an adult. I loved it, but I could only play music off the written page with a band and conductor. I wanted to play more by ear and with other people. I got really inspired at the National Folk Festival in Butte, so I bought a mandolin and started taking lessons with Bill Neaves. I really didn’t even know what bluegrass was, but Bill was a great teacher, and he introduced me to MRBA and encouraged me to start jamming.

### **When did you start hosting the slow jam workshops.?**

I think a bit over 10 years, on and off. I’ve done some with Bequia Martel, Phyllis Erck, Zach Willams, and now with Matt Jolly. We’ve also done a few harmony singing workshops. Lots of MRBA members have sat in and helped over the years, which is really what it takes to be successful.

### **What are the common concerns that newbies have when they start coming to the jam?**

Most attendees play and practice by themselves at home, and they want to take the leap to playing with others. It can be intimidating and scary. I get that! I went to a Sorrento Canada workshop, and the slow jams were so helpful for me. I still appreciate those jams and the kind folks who put them on. No one is born knowing how to do this. We all have to learn.

### **What are some of the tips that you have for beginning jammers?**

Bluegrass is a wonderful language. You can go all over the country and the world and play with others, but you need to learn and understand some of the bluegrass “rules.” We call this “jam etiquette.” We talk about this a lot in our slow jams. The more experienced players have lots of input in this conversation. The rules aren’t chiseled in stone, and every jam is different, so you have to be able to “read the room” and participate in a way that works for everyone. Not all jams are for everyone, so it’s important to figure out which ones are right for you.

### **What are three words you would use to describe a slow jam workshop?**

- **Slow!!** We want folks to be able to play along with those chords and even try a solo (break) when they are ready.
- **Encouraging!!** We want folks to feel welcome to try some new things. Mistakes are just fine. Trying is what’s important. Maybe that’s singing or playing a solo in front of people for the first time ever.
- **Fun!!** It’s just really enjoyable to make music with people for the first time. It’s a great feeling.

### **What is the most humorous question/comment you’ve heard at a slow jam?**

Last week we had a lively (but fun) conversation about bringing lyrics, music sheets, or tabs or IPADS to a jam. Shall we say opinions varied!

### **What is your most inspiring success story of someone who came to a slow jam?**

There are a bunch. It’s amazing how many people come to a slow jam who REALLY want to play but are just terrified, and a few months later, there they are confidently leading and kicking off a song they’ve learned. It’s really cool to see!

# Montana Rockies Bluegrass Association Bluegrass Festival and Fundraiser

## Saturday April 13, 2024

Neely Center @ 150 S A Street, Victor, Mt

**Starts 11:00 am until 8:00 pm**



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 11:00- 93 North, Salmon, Id                         | 3:30- Mike & Tari Conroy- Conner, Mt      |
| 11:30- The Jolley Family- Corvallis, Mt             | 4:00- Pinegrass- Missoula, Mt             |
| 12:00- Darby Sireens- Montana & Idaho               | 4:30- Foggy Mtn. Girls- Payson, Ut        |
| 12:30- Matt Jolly & Mark Vosburgh- Missoula, Mt     | 5:00- Greg Boyd Band- Missoula, Mt        |
| 1:00- Patty & Anne/ Star Chilson- Bitterroot Valley | 5:30- Release The Squirrels- Missoula, Mt |
| 1:30- Elk Ridge- Deerlodge, Mt                      | 6:00- A Well Beaten Path- Deerlodge, Mt   |
| 2:00- Old Freight Road- Helena, Mt                  | 6:30- Johnny Campbell Band- Nashville, Tn |
| 2:30- Creekside Serenade- Florence, Mt              | 7:00- Lochwood- Missoula, Mt              |
| 3:00- Mountain Strings- Rigby, Id                   | 7:30- Bluegrass Hollers- Missoula, Mt     |

Eighteen continuous bands until 8:00 pm

Admission: non-members \$5.00 MRBA members: Free – children under 12 - free

More info: 406-821-3777 [mtbluegrass.com](http://mtbluegrass.com)

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Me/ And /Dad  
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Bluegrass  
*Willie Nelson*

Lovin' of the Game  
*Michael Cleveland*

Radio John: Songs of John Hartford  
*Sam Bush*

## Twin Bridges Festival—Cancelled

### Twin Bridges Bluegrass Festival Cancellation

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but due to the emergence of a situation at the fairground, the Twin Bridges Bluegrass Festival has been cancelled. Let me say that the staff of the facility, who worked so very hard to help pull off the first Twin Bridges festival is in no way to blame. I have put on 20 multi-day bluegrass festivals and their crew was the absolute best I have ever worked with. But, like has happened so many times, in so many places, politics reared its ugly head and ruined what could have been a huge boon to the town of Twin Bridges, to Madison County in general, and to bluegrass fans in multiple states. I have been asked if there wasn't another place in which to hold the festival, but currently I know of no other location that would check all the boxes that are required to produce a successful event. I had to search for several years to find this one, and nothing venue-wise has changed.

I am thankful for the support you all have shown, and I sincerely hope you all enjoyed the one and only Twin Bridges Bluegrass Festival in 2023. This is not the first time I have experienced this, but it will most certainly be the last, as I am done promoting music. Instead of working my butt off so other folks can enjoy themselves, I will instead do normal human things, like go fishing, or just sit with friends and pick tunes for fun. I hope you all have a fun and productive year, and if you would, please say a prayer for the folks who were most affected by the behind the scenes goings on.

Yours truly,  
Gene Bach

## Deer Lodge Bluegrass Campout

June 27,28,29,30

1975 Dempsey Lake Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722.

Dry camping and portable toilets.  
Pot lucks on Friday and Saturday evening and Sunday morning.  
Big fire pit and an easy set-up for jamming.

Hosted by: Bill & Charlene





# Memory Lane MRBA Spring Festival

(by Kate McMahon)

Last newsletter I posted a notice requesting old MRBA newsletters for the archives. I received a real treasure trove when I opened a package from Shirley Rushing with newsletters dating back to 1999. Thanks Shirley for the memories. Since the MRBA Spring Festival is coming up in April, I thought it would be fun to browse through the newsletters and walk down memory lane to recall spring festivals of years past.

The earliest mention in the old newsletters was from 2000. The festival was scheduled for April 15 and was called the "Tax Day Festival." It was held at the Victor High School. According to the newsletter, "It will start at 12:00 noon and run until 11 pm that night. We are asking association members and future members to get groups together to perform a half-hour set at the festival. We will be selling chili and soup and would like to get as many people involved in the association." Except for ending a little earlier, the basic format is about the same.

By 2005, the festival had moved to the Stevensville Junior High School and the name changed to "MRBA Oldtime Bluegrass Festival." MRBA volunteers were now recording the festival, and each band would pick its favorite song to be included on a compilation CD that was sold at subsequent festivals and jams. The historic Stevensville Hotel was within walking distance and was a favorite for bands, while the Arrow Inn Motel had rooms for \$40 a night and RV hook-ups. Bands were playing until 11:30 pm, and members were asked to bring either pie or cookies. The delicious desserts are still a highly anticipated feature of the festival.

According to the 2010 newsletter, the festival was still at the Stevensville Junior High, but MRBA was also renting the American Legion Hall, "...for folks who would like to park overnight and/or jam and visit after the festival. Sunday morning we will do a free biscuits and gravy breakfast at the American Legion Hall before folks head home." The "Kids in Bluegrass" were the opening act and have been crowd favorites for many years at the festival.

After the Junior High was no longer available, the festival moved to Lone Rock School outside of Stevensville. Campers could stay on the grounds overnight and enjoy the biscuits and gravy breakfast at the school the next morning. Some years the temperatures hit 70 degrees, and folks could enjoy jamming outdoors. Other years, coats and mittens might be required.

Somewhere along the line, the festival name changed to "MRBA Spring Festival," but the hot pickin' and soulful harmonies by festival bands from Montana, Idaho, and Washington continued to thrill the crowd.

During the pandemic, the Spring Festival had to be canceled, but it returned to Victor and came back as good as ever. Some of the faces are the same while new bands and fresh young faces are now part of the lineup. No matter the location, the names of the bands, or the fickle weather, the Spring Festival is guaranteed to be a memorable day of bluegrass music.

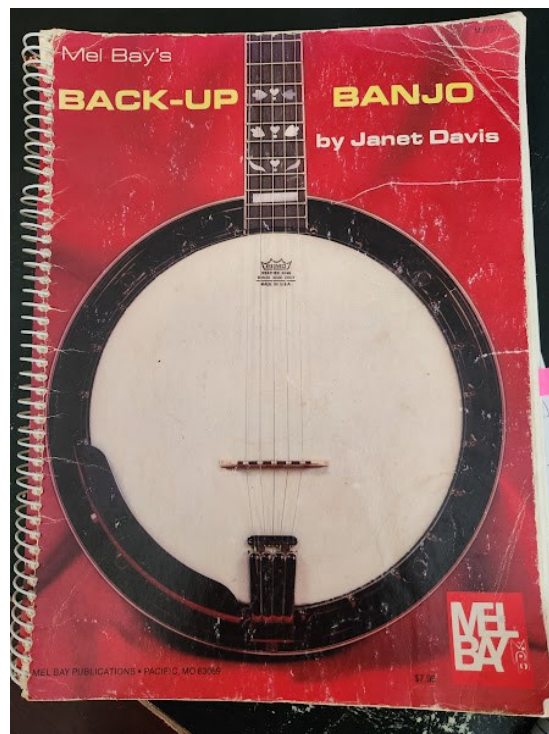


## Back-up Banjo by Janet Davis

Article by Kate McMahon

In 1983, when I bought my first banjo and started taking music lessons, my instructor told me to buy two books. They were “Earl Scruggs and Five String Banjo” and “Back-up Banjo” by Janet Davis. Forty years later, these are still classic books that you will find in most banjo players’ libraries. Following are pointers from Janet Davis for the banjo, but most tips apply to all types of back-up.

1. **PLAY QUIETLY**—Stay in the background. If playing into a microphone, step back from it when playing back-up. It is easy to have so much fun playing back-up that you forget that you are not supposed to be the center of attention. Your overall objectives should be to **COMPLIMENT** the lead instrument.
2. **LISTEN TO THE LEAD INSTRUMENT AND STRIVE FOR BALANCE**— A general rule is play on the higher tones of the banjo, (up the neck) when the lead instrument is playing the deep tones; play with the deeper tones of the banjo (near the peghead) when the lead is playing the higher pitched tones (i.e., the lead instrument is the fiddle or mandolin).
3. **RIGHT HAND POSITION IS IMPORTANT**—When the left hand is playing up the neck, the right hand should be positioned close to the fingerboard. When the left hand is playing the deeper tones, the right hand should pick the strings near the bridge. Right hand positioning adds expression to the overall effect of the song.
4. **LISTEN TO THE TEMPO OF THE SONG**—Find a back-up rhythm pattern (or style) that will fit that particular tempo. Generally, you will be safe if you “Vamp” chords high on the fingerboard while you are getting a feel for the song.
5. **FILL IN THE GAPS**—Generally, the banjo should come forward (play louder) and play fill-in licks during the pauses in the melody line.
6. **LISTEN TO THE TOTAL EFFECT OF THE SONG**—If other instruments are also playing back-up, try do something that they aren’t doing. Step back if another instrument is taking the dominant role in the back-up and you find you are competing.
7. **EFFECTIVE BACK-UP INVOLVES KNOWING AND PLAYING CHORDS!** Also, the frequent use of passing tones greatly enhances the overall effectiveness of the song.





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### Bluegrass Question of the Month

*From the Easter Bunny.*

How many bluegrass songs can you name that have the word "rabbit" in the lyrics?

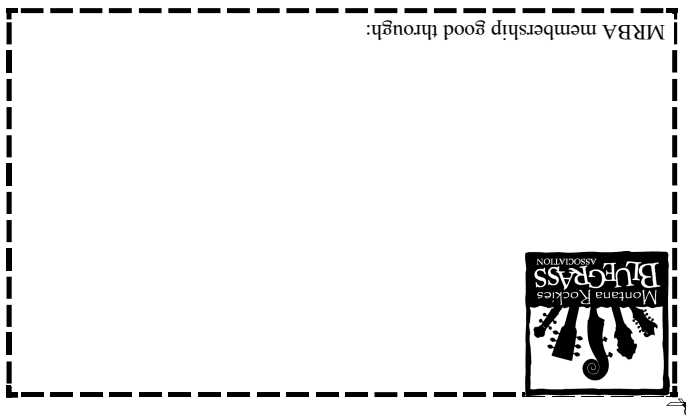


### Bluegrass Limerick

There once was a picker named Bruno  
Who said, "There's one thing I do know  
Guitars are fine  
And mandolins divine  
But banjos are numero uno!"

***ATTENTION:***

We have set up the address label on your newsletter to be your membership card. Please clip it out and use it for proof of your membership to the MRBA.



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