

Central

# Texas Bluegrass

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IBMA Member

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## A Mournful Sound is Blowing Through Texas

It was quite a shock to learn of the sudden and tragic death of **Jake Jenkins**, a native Texan and accomplished songwriter and banjo player for the "Karl Shiflett and Big Country Show" band between 1993 and 2003.

Jake (age 40) and his parents Dan and Dorothy Jenkins were killed early Sunday morning on March 27, 2011 when the small, single-engine vintage plane Jake was piloting crashed near his private air strip in rural Dickens County. I had the pleasure of meeting Jake and his young son Eli a year ago when CTBA brought Jake out of retirement--albeit briefly--to do a bluegrass show at Rice-Grass: An Old Timey



and Bluegrass festival in Fischer, Texas on March 28, 2010. I remember making a cold call to Jake at his home in Dickens, Texas (near Lubbock) a few weeks prior to the festival to see if we could lure him away from his professional firefighting career in Lubbock, which he had begun in 2005 in order to be closer to his family. It wasn't that hard to convince him--you could just tell he had music in his bones and was chomping at the bit to get back on stage. Jake enthusiastically agreed even though he claimed to be pretty "rusty" on the banjo. Although he had been playing occasionally with the Hickory Hill Band, we invited Jake to come and perform at Ricegrass with an all-star cast of local musicians that we knew were sure to impress--Dennis McDaniel on mandolin, Chojo Jacques on fiddle, Tom Ellis on bass, and Jeff Robertson on guitar/vocals. I know he had a great time because a few weeks after festival, he called me up and said, "Hey, I was just wondering....did you make any money putting on that festival? That was so much fun that we thought it might be fun to try and do something like that around here." I think he had been around bluegrass long enough to realize he probably already knew the answer before he even picked up the phone to call and ask me. Still, it was gratifying to learn that

he thought the experience was worth repeating.

After picking up Jake, Eli and Jake's friend from the San Marcos airport last year, we had a chance to visit on the way to Fischer. Jake's passion for flying, family, and music was readily apparent. That day, Jake had flown in on the same single-engine 1946 Stinson 108 that would take his life almost a year to the day later. The accident is still under investigation. Jenkins was known to frequently fly his beloved Stinson from his home in Dickens to his job in Lubbock, almost 70 miles away. Jake graduated from Rockdale High School in 1989 and from South Plains College in 1992, studying bluegrass music and specializing in the banjo. Before going on the road full time with Karl Shiflett in 1996, Jenkins had worked at Collings guitars in Austin, having already been trained as a Certified Luthier. His song "Worries On My Mind," written in 1996, became a number one hit on the bluegrass charts, and it was in the top 10 on the Texas Music Charts. Other songs by Jenkins also gained recognition on bluegrass charts including "Cold, Cold Love" and "Turn Around." Shiflett credits Jenkins with creating the sound that the band had. Shiflett has been quoted as saying, "Jake's contributions to the band and to bluegrass were monumental and put us on the map. He took the basic banjo sound and incorporated aspects of western swing music, giving the group its country honky-tonk flavor." In addition to mastering the banjo, Jake also played the guitar, mandolin, bass. By all accounts, Jake has left a big old hole in the hearts of his family and the bluegrass community alike.

The Karl Shiflett and Big Country Show band performed a memorial benefit on April 22 at the Cactus Theater in Lubbock. Shiflett also noted on his web site that a tribute CD is being put together compiled of songs written by Jake during his time with the band. Shiflett says the project will contain 12 songs previously recorded on three different Rebel records, and sales proceeds will benefit Jake's wife and children. Jake is survived by his wife Rhonda Jenkins, his son Eli Jackson (age 9), and two daughters--Maggie Marie (age 7) and Ella Rose (age 5)--who live in Dickens. Two "Jake Jenkins Memorial Funds" for Jake's family have also been established at the following financial institutions: (1) WesTex Federal Credit Union, 901 Avenue Q, Lubbock, TX 79401-2603 (806-765-5701); and (2) Spur Security Bank, 120 West Harris Street, Spur, TX 79370-2326, (806-271-3301). *By Jami Hampton*



## Hazel Dickens Final Performance @ SXSW

*This is a brief part of Sharon Sandomirsky interview with Hazel when she stayed with Sharon during SXSW. Hazel performed her final performance in Austin. She passed on April 22, 2011. She was 75. Photo by Keri Green*

*How did you get started singing?*

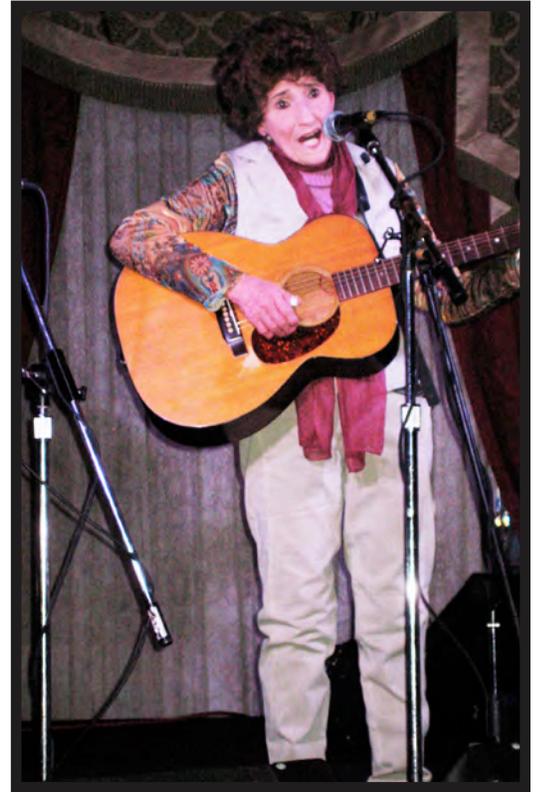
I started singing when I was very, very young. Probably the reason was that most of my family was interested in music and my father was a strong singer. He would sometimes lead the hymns in church and I was around that scene for many, many years. From there on in it was either singing with family or the local radio and the big thing was listening to the Grand Ole Opry. Most of the artists were singing mostly traditional music. It was either traditional or a very old time music like Uncle Dave Macon, the Possum Hunters, Roy Acuff, and many people like that. If I heard a song that I liked I would start copying it down, generally by the second time I heard it I could have all the words. I had a pretty good memory for that.



After that I began singing like in small clubs in Baltimore. I didn't really have any idea I was going to be a singer. I was mostly just trying to feed myself. I was very young and I had no money. Nobody around me had any money either. Then my brothers started moving up to where we were in Baltimore and we started a little family band. Then some outside people would come, like Mike Seeger, would play with us. He had an old Chevrolet and he would take us up to Sunset Park and New River Ranch. That was my first exposure to any of the outside world. Vocalists Jean Shepherd, Kitty Wells, and Wilma Lee Cooper were my first models but I didn't think of myself as a singer. Some of the people I was involved with started to get us some small jobs and...it established me then as somebody that might be involved in singing so I began to take it more seriously and thought that might be a possibility.

*When did you start writing your own music?*

Probably when we did our first album for Folkways. That was the first thing that I had ever done commercially. We didn't have any of our own material on it. So I wrote "Won't You Come and Sing For Me" because we had done mostly covers up to that point. That was the first song I did that was recorded and that established me as a writer. From thereon in it gave me more incentive to write. I didn't know I could write. I had no idea. Because I quit school so early I really didn't have any background on anything. I could sing, not with this voice I have now, back then I could do just about anything I wanted to do with it. Having strong singers around me and my family, most of my brothers picked and sang, and we sang with all of them, including two of my sisters. So that sort of set me off to start thinking of myself as a singer and a writer. I think maybe I was capable of doing it and I was doing it but in reality I couldn't see myself as that. Then people began reviewing our records and they were saying "she's a writer and a singer" and I had never heard that before. I had never heard anyone call me a writer. It was a lot of encouragement. Particularly, people like Mike Seeger who really, really encouraged me to sing and was always taking me places where I could be exposed to singing. I went from there to singing with Alice Gerrard and we did three or four records together. Then I went out on my own and fronted my own band and that's what I've been doing for the past 35-40 years I guess. I still go out occasionally but not all the time because of my health. I still think about it the same way as I did when I was younger and it still excites me the same as it did then. When I can't sleep at night I lay there and write songs in my head. I lose them of course but last night I did that. I wrote many country and western songs last night, all night long, no wonder I couldn't sleep. I've written many hymns and traditional songs just in my head and then I guess somewhere along the way I got more established in the business and they started considering me as a singer and writer. That's just the way it ended up. Not knowing, not planning a future like that. Because of my background, my family, and my friends who boosted me and the women that I heard and saw encouraged me. I sing and write now and I talk too much.

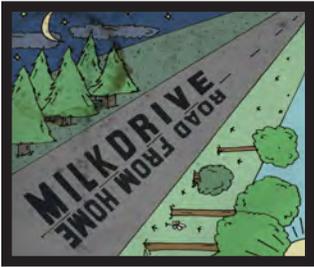


## Randall's Good Neighbor Program

The process to get this started is a bit of a pain, but it makes donating to CTBA, your local schools, or your favorite non-profit organizations very, very easy. Just go to the link below, print the form and fill it out, enter **CTBA's code 9735**, and take to your local Randall's store:

[http://shop.safeway.com/corporate/randalls/gn\\_houston\\_austin.pdf](http://shop.safeway.com/corporate/randalls/gn_houston_austin.pdf)

# The Listening Post



## Milkdrive

Is it bad if you like guitarist **Noah Jeffries** "The Ventures of Smiley Bob Part 2" better than "Part 1"? Audiences at Old Settlers discovered Milkdrive as the opening act Thursday night. They cut loose on several of their earlier original compositions and played several cuts off this newest CD "**Road From Home**" (released April 5th). At OSMF they played the awesome "Stepping Stones" written by Greencard's Kym Warner and Kai Welch & Jamie Dick of Abigail Washburn's band and fiddler **Brian Beken's** "Back", both with interesting time signatures. Neither are traditional bluegrass... for that you have to listen to "Last Night I Dreamed" or the murderous lyrics of "Dry Creek Inn".

The best bluegrass jam I heard at OSMF was with Greensky Bluegrass, Warren Hood on fiddle, and **Dennis Ludiker** on mandolin. It was that jam that made me realize that bluegrass in Texas is in some really good hands and the future is looking good.



*The Listening Post is a forum established to monitor bluegrass musical recordings, live performances, or events in Texas. Our mailbox sometimes contains CDs for us to review. Here is where you will find reviews of the CD's Central Texas Bluegrass Association receives as well as reviews of live performances or workshops.*

## Old Settlers Blows in with Some Great Bluegrass



This 24th year of the Old Settlers Music Festival was one for the record books. It didn't rain a drop but Mother Nature wasn't going to let us off easy. She kicked up the wind and dust and dropped the temperatures down to where it was almost cold for us native-born Texans. At the last minute there was a band cancellation that may have been a disappointment for some but this bluegrass fan was content to see Audie Blaylock, Greensky Bluegrass, Tim O'Brien, and the masterful Sam Bush. All of the acts were fantastic. Hey, where else can you see over a thousand people grooving on the sounds of one guy and a ukulele (Jake Shimabukuro)? There were some awesome performances by The Hillbenders, Green Mountain Grass, MilkDrive, The WayneBillies, and it's always a pleasure to see Warren Hood. Thanks Jean Spivey and all the Old Settlers folks for putting on a class act. Let's do again!!!



## CTBA Membership drive at Old Settlers Music Festival WINNING TICKET

will be drawn at May 1st CTBA Board meeting for the guitar donated by Fiddlers Green. The winner will be contacted after the meeting.

ALSO stay tuned for this year's  
**SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS**  
in next month's issue! Pick it up!



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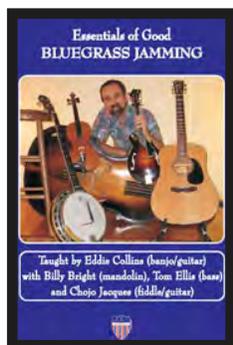
# Picks, Happenings, and Releases



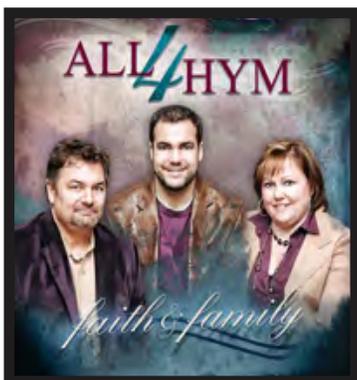
Live Oak is an invitational fiddle camp with a limited number of spaces. If you are interested in attending the camp, please email a short bio and mp3 or link to [musicinfo@liveoakfiddlecamp.com](mailto:musicinfo@liveoakfiddlecamp.com). Instructors are **Stuart Duncan, Darol Anger, Wes Westmoreland** and **Hanneke Cassel**! This is **advanced fiddle instruction** for players 17 and up by masters of a variety of styles including bluegrass, Texas-style, old-time, swing, jazz and Celtic. The camp is held in an intimate ranch setting. Housing and food are included in the camp fee. TR Ranch in Hallettsville, TX Sunday, May 29, 2011-Wednesday, June 1, 2011



**"Fanning the Fire"** is a vibrant short documentary film shot in high-definition video that shows us a young Texas teen who followed his dreams from being a fan of bluegrass music all the way to taking the stage, with guitar in hand, to open for some of the greatest entertainers in the business – in less than three years. Along the way we see why people young and old get hooked on playing this music and enjoying companionship at festivals around the world. We also enjoy behind-the-scenes visits with master musicians from the USA and Europe and hear how they came to appreciate this uniquely American form of music and why it has broad appeal to beginning players and professionals alike. Visit **Bluegrass Heritage Foundation** for more information.



CTBA's own **Eddie Collins** serves as emcee and plays banjo and guitar on a new instructional DVD called **"Essentials Of Good Bluegrass Jamming"**. He is joined by **Billy Bright** on mandolin; **Chojo Jacques** on fiddle and guitar; and **Tom Ellis** on bass. The point of the video isn't to teach the learner new songs, but rather to improve on the performance of any song the learner may end up playing in a jam session. Several play-along tracks are included for practice. Common jam songs are used as vehicles to present the concepts. More information can be found at [www.eddiecollins.biz](http://www.eddiecollins.biz).



There is a great new Gospel Bluegrass release last month from Rural Records recording artists **All4Hym** that is definitely worth listening to. **Faith & Family** features songs by some exceptional songwriters such as **Jerry Salley** and **Dee Gaskins** as well as **Wendy Waldman, Bill Wray, Ronny Hinson, Mark "Brink" Brinkman** and **Mary Beth Cordle**. **Cory Kreitzer's** deep rich vocals are beautifully showcased on the first single titled, "Learning To Be Like You", written by Jerry and Dee with a strong message about faith and family. Blessed with a beautiful voice, **Terri Kreitzer** says, "All4Hym has always followed the mantra that if a song deeply touches you; makes you cry or makes you feel-period, then it's a keeper for our album." Though the messages are varied in subject matter the overall constant feel throughout the album is about FAITH & FAMILY.



# BLUE BELL AND BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL



May 28th and 29th  
On The Square  
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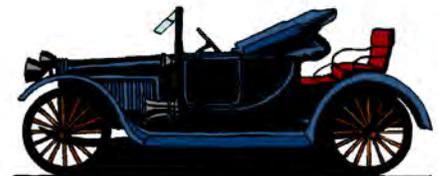
Saturday Performance Schedule  
10am - 11am - The Wimberley Bunch  
11am - Noon - WST Bluegrass Band



Break for Lunch  
1am - 2pm - Bee Creek Boys  
2pm - 3pm - Bluebonnet Pickers



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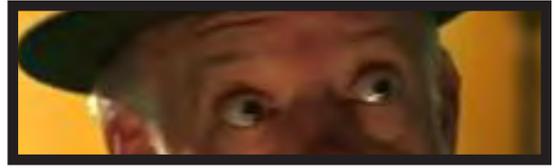
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# Thank You Tom Pittman



By Eddie Collins

On the afternoon of Sunday, April 17th, Tom Pittman, long-time friend of the Austin traditional and bluegrass music scenes, signed off for the last time on KUT radio's Folkways program. Always one to tie his shows together with a theme, Tom's last show featured such bluegrass standards as "Ain't Nobody Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone," and "Will You Miss Me?" Rhetorically, the answer to the latter inquiry is yes, of course we'll miss you.

Tom is perhaps better known for his 30+-year stint as the banjo player for the Austin Lounge Lizards. He, along with Hank Card and Conrad Deisler, stuck together all those years as founding members of the satirically-tinged combo. While Tom played his last show with the group this past February, the band plans to continue on as a four-piece group. Naturally, I wondered if he foresaw any reunion gigs. "Probably, but not any time soon," says Tom.

Pittman also played steel guitar on Lizard tunes that needed that drowning-in-your-beer kind of sound, such as "Old Blevins." After 9/11 it became next to impossible to travel with the steel, so he earnestly pursued Dobro and became a welcome double threat picker at many local bluegrass jam sessions. He remembers first playing Dobro at a show in Santa Cruz, CA before it had really been worked into the band. This came about due to a power outage in which they went ahead and played the show with minimal battery powered lighting and no PA. "Surprisingly, it was a great show!" recalls Tom.

Tom doesn't recall exactly when he first started radio in Austin, but believes it was during the summer of 1993. I remember him telling me once that he never thought he'd find a job that could pay less than being a musician, but lo and behold ... radio! Of course, part of this was due to his willingness to donate his time for a good cause. And when the cause was supporting bluegrass or old-time music, Tom has long been one of the first to step forward. He joined the all-volunteer staff of KOOP radio's Sunday morning Strictly Bluegrass show in 1997 and has always been heard on the Fund Drives for both KUT and KOOP. With his unmistakable deep baritone voice, he often took on emcee duties of events for both AFTM and CTBA.

"As far as radio goes, I learned from the best. When I got to Austin, I listened to Larry Monroe, John Aielli, Paul Ray, David Obermann, Ed Miller, Dan Foster and others on KUT. I started really listening and studying how shows get constructed," explains Tom as to his success on the airwaves.

Tom and his wife Elizabeth further supported music in Austin by opening their home as a venue to traveling musicians for concerts and workshops. Elizabeth has been with the Double Eagle String band for years and leaves behind her own legacy. Like Tom, she has taken on many a volunteer role, most notably in serving on the board of AFTM.

The Pittmans are relocating to an area rich in traditional music, Asheville, NC. As fate would have it, the station manager at WNCW in nearby Spindale, NC, is Dana Whitehair, formerly of KUT. Tom shares, "He's already recruited me to be on the team that's going to broadcast from MerleFest, and then I'll be doing fill in work on the eight hour Saturday Bluegrass show, Goin' Across the Mountain. Bluegrass fans will know that WNCW is the premier broadcast station anywhere for Bluegrass, so I couldn't have been luckier."

When pressing Tom in regards to a feeling a sense of pride in any of his accomplishments, I learned that until recently, he had never listened to a Lounge Lizard CD all the way through. The length of the drive to North Carolina has changed that. As Tom explains, "Last time I went to NC I drove by myself and decided to listen to the entire Lizard catalog—nine CD's and an EP. I was very proud of the body of work that we put out. If I've left a mark on the world, that's where it is."

It sounds as though the Pittmans don't intend to be strangers to Austin and will plan return trips around music events, such as the annual Fall AFTM String Band Festival and Old Setter's in the spring. So yes, Tom, we will miss you when you're gone, but it's great to know you won't be gone too long. Again, many thanks for all you've done to support the music that we love and cherish.

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**Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup> John McEuen  
(cofounder of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band)**

**Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> Mark Allen Atwood song writer show**

**Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> Out Of The Blue**

**Sunday the 29<sup>th</sup> Blaze Folley movie with Gurf Morlix**

**June:**

**Saturday the 4<sup>th</sup> Ghost of the Brazos**

**Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup> The Lost Pines (matinee)**

**Saturday the 11<sup>th</sup> The Bee Creek Boys**

**Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> Ruby Jane**

**July:**

**Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> Karl Shifflet (matinee)**

**Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> Gary P. Nunn**

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## Meet CTBA Members: Carol & Jerry Rabun

*Introduce yourself. Tell us your name, a little bit about yourself, what city you live in, and why you joined CTBA.*

We are Jerry & Carol Rabun of Austin, Texas. We met in Odessa, Texas in 1963, shortly after Carol graduated from high school and, after a very short courtship, married on December 1, 1963. My promise to her, when we got married was "Stick with me, baby, and I will get you over the rough spots". Sure enough, she has stayed by my side and, together, we've managed to deal with everything life has to offer. We have 2 children, 4 grandchildren, & 5 great grandchildren (2 of them are "step" great grandchildren).

We joined CTBA in 2010. We were at a first Saturday jam at Pearl when Jami Hampton came up to me and suggested we should be members (she may have threatened to break both my legs if we didn't join). Carol didn't know I had joined and paid Jami our dues and, as soon as we got home from that trip, she got online & joined again. So, for a short period of time we were "twice times" CTBA members in good standing.

*Do you play an instrument?*

At various times, I attempt to play a 5 string banjo, or guitar, depending on my mood and circumstances. Carol is struggling to learn to play mandolin.

*What bluegrass artist do you like to listen to most?*



We don't tend to listen to any one specific bluegrass artist or band, although we like to listen to various bluegrass compilation CDs when we are driving. We usually listen to the XM satellite bluegrass channel in our vehicles or on DirecTV in our home or RV.

*What is your all time favorite bluegrass song?*

My all-time favorite bluegrass song, though it isn't bluegrass per se, is "Under The Double Eagle" (in C) played by Doc & Merle Watson.

*Jerry has a great hobby of finding old banjos and restoring them back to life. He is also turning into a really good setup man for banjos. Give him a few minutes with yours. He made mine sound great!*

*After this email Jerry sent me another message that said When my bride and I got married, I was dead broke. She had to buy our wedding bands...the same ones we have on in the photo have been on our fingers for 47+ years.*




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# BLUEGRASS CAMP



**May  
18-22  
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Leadership for the Bluegrass Music Camp will be provided by Mike Finders and friends. Mike is a singer, songwriter, guitar-picker and professional educator transplanted to Colorado from the Midwest. Mike will be joined by Aaron Youngberg, Erin Youngberg, Gregg Daigle, Eli West, Cahalen Morrison, Matt Flinner and Ryan Drickey to guide players through standard instrument techniques, including rhythm and lead playing.

GHOST RANCH



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## Is there anything better than a weekend stay at Ghost Ranch?

Yes, a weekend at the Ghost Ranch Bluegrass Camp, a truly transformational music experience in a magnificent setting! Classes will begin at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 18.

Fine tune your ensemble playing and harmony singing while you enjoy the magnificent scenery. During your stay at Ghost Ranch you will sharpen your skills on your instrument, make new friends and get a bluegrass band together to perform for the other campers, all in a low stress, high fun environment.

Leadership for the Bluegrass Music Camp will be provided by Mike Finders and friends. Mike will be joined by members of Finders and Youngberg and other music professionals to guide novice and intermediate players through standard instrument techniques, including rhythm and lead playing. Additional instruction will be available in singing, harmony singing and songwriting.

### **Camp Classes include:**

**Instrument Classes** - Guitar, Mandolin, Fiddle, Banjo, Clawhammer Banjo, and Bass.

**Beginning Vocals** - Learn how to get the most out of your voice, conquer inhibitions, find your range and how to choose the correct key.

**Harmony Vocals** - How does harmony work in Bluegrass? Work on tenor and baritone vocal parts, learn tricks for arrangements of vocal parts and get lots of practice trying harmony.

**Ensemble and Performance** - How do bluegrass bands get away with using just one microphone? Where should I stand? What should I say in between songs? How loudly should I sing my harmony? These questions and more will be answered.

Registration fee: \$350 + housing & meals

(On the registration form, housing fees reflect a six night stay. To determine housing costs for this course, divide the six night fee by six and multiply by four.) If you are flying into the Albuquerque or Santa Fe Airports, you may want to arrive on Tuesday as most mid-West and Eastern flights arrive after 1:00 p.m. The drive from Albuquerque airport is approximately 2.5 hours.

## Artist Profile: Tom Ellis

*Tom Ellis is one of Austin's well know luthiers but he is also well known for the inlay work he has done for Collings, Taylor, & Gibson...to name a few.*

*(Noticed an unfinished mandolin) How long does it take to put a finish on one of these puppies?*

It takes about a month and we don't do it here. We send them off to Josh Luttrell in Missouri. He's my varnish master.

*So you tell him what finish you want.*

Josh stains them similarly, but I have a couple of different colors. This is what is called cremona. That's what Gibson called these finishes.

*So light in the center, dark on the edges is Cremona?*

Yes, and yellow to brown without any orange. I do a lot of others where the center has a little more orange/gold and they are really more colorful.

*You do mostly F models but this is an A model. How long have you been doing A models.*

I started doing the designing for the A5 in the Summer of 2008 and had the first 4 mandolins ready to debut at IBMA in Oct. We've built about 70 of them and about 30 F5's since the A's came out.

*Wow! In two 1/2 years you've built a hundred instruments! That's almost one a week. About how many F models do you plan for this year?*

This year we're doing 50-50. Last year it was about 70/30% A's to F's but now we are going to concentrate more on F's, mostly because we have orders for them. I expect to make 50 this year.



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*I learned from you at Old Settlers what the F stood for.*

Florentine!

*I was looking at your bio and it mentions that you grew up near Houston. Anything that was near Houston in the early 70's is now in Houston...whereabouts?*

I grew up in Seabrook and lived right on Galveston Bay... near where NASA is. I went to high school at Clear Creek in League City class of '71. Interestingly in my graduating class were 3 well known banjo players - Jim Moratto, Bernard Mollberg, and Sue Rogers.



*League City has a big bluegrass scene with the Bay Area Bluegrass Association. Have you been down to the new facility they moved into here while back?*

I've not been to a new facility, though I have gone a few times 10-15 yrs ago. When my Dad was alive, he lived down there and he used to go regularly. He and Ed Fryday were friends.

*How'd you get to Austin?*

I went to college at Sam Houston State, graduated in '75. I stayed there working for a year and then made the move to Austin in '77

*Didn't Dave Seeman go to school down there about that time too?*

I met him there in Huntsville, yes. He was friends with Pat Fowler & Becky Smith of the Cypress Swamp Stompers who I had just met when I got interested in bluegrass. Which was about '72, I guess...whenever the "Circle" album came out. We dived into that and started chomping like everyone else did. After that album came out we started discovering Chet Atkins, Merle Travis, which was different from the rock & roll we were listening to. We all went down to H&H Music and I bought a banjo. My friend Doug Powell, who still lives here and plays mandolin in Dadgum Swing and Ain't Misbehavin', he bought a mandolin and we started playing the kind of stuff they were playing on that "Circle" album...knowing nothing about it. Next thing I did to discover Bluegrass was call County Sales and ordered "the 20 albums I need to start, you pick."

*I talked to Hoot (Dennis McDaniel) about Cash Edward's Ellis Mandolin and he was saying that he had worked with you on some of the early mandolins.*

Not at the time I made Cash's mandolin. In 1997 Dennis and I got together most Wednesday's and built three mandolins and three rifles together. So we finished the mandolins in 1999. He got two of them #68 & #69 and I kept #67 which is my blonde top. The rifles are almost done (laughter).

*Is Precision Pearl still a large part of your business?*

Yes, probably 3/4ths of it. From the late 80's up until '93 I was building fewer and fewer instruments and I made a few thousand fossilized bridge pins. I had been doing custom pearl inlays for lots of other people, and realized quickly that there was a potential market for pearl inlays made with computer controlled routers which were becoming more affordable. I was in on the ground floor of CNC pearl cutting and was in close contact with my friend Larry Sifel who had started Pearlworks, our main competitor, we both helped each

other a lot in the beginning.

*I know you do mass quantities of items but I've heard that you can sometimes be convinced to do special work for individuals.*

That's extremely rare, maybe one half of one percent. I may do one or two jobs a year and usually when I'm absolutely forced to. I had to do a custom fingerboard name a few months ago for Conan O'Brien for Collings but normally we wouldn't do that kind of one off work.

*Your web site mentions all the different types of inlays that can be purchased in large quantities so I take it that it's not cost effective to work with the small shop that produces a few instruments per year.*

That's true, that doesn't really work for us but the stock designs are available to purchase one at a time We have most of the common pattern that everybody uses. We make and sell the ebony fingerboards that we inlay, also.

*What materials are used with the inlays?*



Mother of Pearl and Abalone. We use Philippine Mother of Pearl, sometimes called gold lip. It is the prettiest of all the pearl species because of the iridescent colors it shows. We also use red & green abalone.

*Didn't you mention to me once long ago that there are certain pearl types that can't be put into instruments?*

Yes, the federal regulations have become more and more stringent. There are only 2 shell species that are endangered, but they were never used for inlay material anyway so that's not an issue. It's largely focused on importing and exporting. There are laws that apply within the US, but all of the shell we use is legal shell imported through US, Mexico, & Phillipines Fish & Wildlife. Basically what the law is there for is to prevent shell from being harvested illegally. What I told you was the law is such that if the shell was illegally imported then the guitar or instrument it is in is an illegal instrument. As of 2008 all these laws apply to wood, too.

*Like tortoise shell?*

Not exactly. Shell inlay is not a restricted material. It's not endangered or threatened, but ALL wildlife materials have to be legally imported. Tortoise shell and Brazilian Rosewood cannot be imported at all.

*Do you make the bridges and nuts here in the shop?*

For nuts, we buy the bone blanks and then machine it to a slightly oversized nut. We also make our own bridges.

*What type of bone is it? An old friend?*

(Laughter) My guess is that it's cowbones. Unbleached. Most bone that you see has been bleached and is white. I like the unbleached ones better and also they are a little greasier.

*How many people are working for you?*

Seven total. I guess I should say "about half" (laughter). That's an old Bill Collings line. The mandolins are built by Pava Knezevic and myself, Nate does what nobody else can do, and Mary machines wood parts as well as inlaying. Melba, Andrea, and Emily run inlays and Cathy runs the shop. Ginger Evans is currently part time.

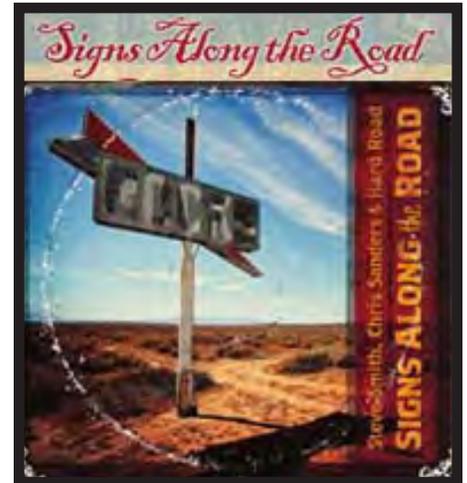
*Ricky Skaggs was using one of your mandolins. Does he still use them.*

He used them for about 18 years but he sold them. He had two of them. I had one of them back for a refret. It's owned by somebody else now but I thought it still sounded great. There are several old youtube clips of him playing one.

*What other artists are currently using an Ellis (that you know of)?*

I don't have too many stars but I have a few touring pros that use them. **Steve Smith** from New Mexico, plays with Alan Munde. Steve's been playing one for years.

*I've heard that mandolin. It's a great instrument and Steve is an excellent musician.*



Oh yea. Let's see, Richard Krein who has been the mandolin player on Prairie Home Companion. Then there's Neil Perry from the Band Perry who is the hot new country act with the girl singer and her two brothers playing bass and mandolin. They've won two ACM awards a few weeks ago, best new band, best new vocal group. He's played it on the Grammys, & CMA on TV. Who else? Tim Laughlin who played for years with Lynn Morris & Dale Ann Bradley. Tim is great player and he has a couple of them. Billy (Bright) of course, Eddie Collins, and Gerald Jones, although Gerald and Eddie don't tour much but both are great teachers. There are a couple others that I can't actually remember right this moment.

*What types of woods do you primarily work with?*



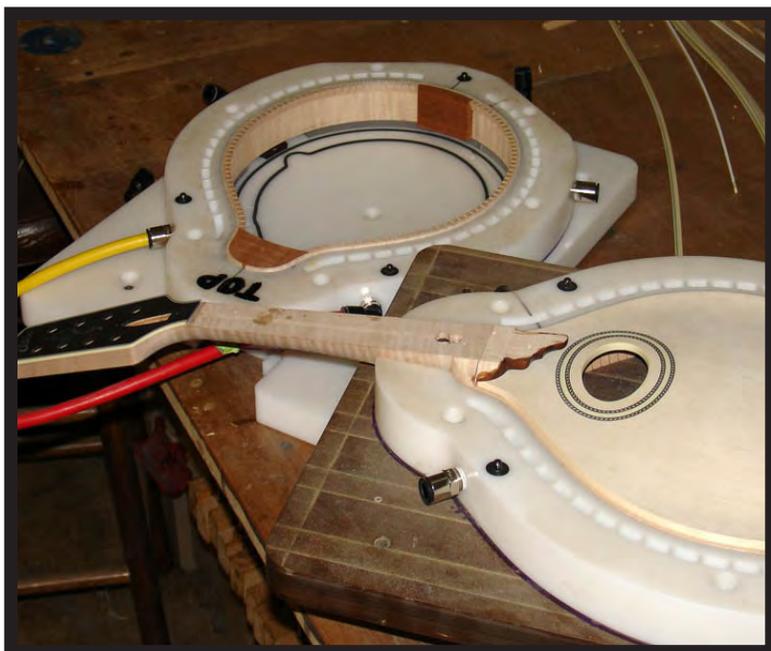
The tops are made of Adirondack Red Spruce and the backs and sides are Sugar Maple or Red Maple which also comes from the Northeast, mostly Pennsylvania. Ebony fingerboard, head top and back. Ivoroid binding and I use TKL cases.

*Are all of your cases that yellow tweed?*

Yes, I like tweed because you can see them on the ground at a festival at night. They get a little dirtier but you're not as likely to step on them. It would probably be a good idea to Scotchguard them all.

*Have you ever made a left hand F model?*

I've seen a few but I've never made one. Our manufacturing process wouldn't allow it. Now I am building a left handed A model. The only thing different is that the tone bars inside will be reversed. The tone bars are generally not symmetrical. One is bigger than the other. I don't think it will make a significant difference in the sound. I've never made one with the tone bars reversed. I've had some sent back and I made a left



handed nut and bridge for them but those could be converted back relatively easily.

*Do you make more than one style of F model. I mean are there more than one sizes or variations in the shape?*

I have 2 models of F5, but they just differ in cosmetics and wood choice, they're all the same size and shape. There are two types of A, though. There's the F hole and the oval hole. We've only made a couple of the oval holes. They aren't very popular.

*They aren't? Is that because of the sound or the look?*

They have a great sound but it's a different kind of a sound. They don't have the punch so you can't really get that chop out of them but they are really nice for playing fiddle tunes.

*I really like how those look. I'm surprised to learn that nobody likes those.*

Well, yes they look good but it's not a popular sound and I hate to say this but you can buy old Gibson oval holes for less than what mine cost. I would just as soon have an old Gibson 1918.

*The beauty of the wood is in the grain...*

Yes, the wrinkling of the grain. As the wrinkles change directions that is what gives you the iridescence of the figures. It's hard to see in the light. You don't see it nearly as well until we get the finish on them. This one we are working on has stripes and bubbles.

*Is a bubble the same thing as a what I've heard called a bearclaw?*

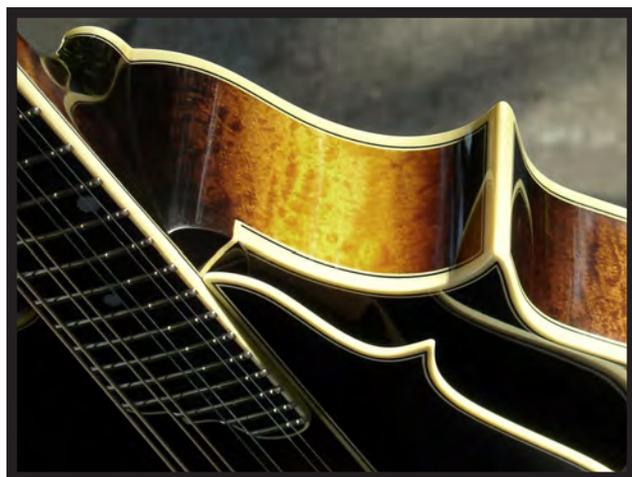
Not really in Maple. It would be called that in Spruce but yes it's pretty much the same thing. It's the wrinkling of the grain. A bearclaw to me is often considered a negative feature and a top might have just one.

*So you have to assess a piece of wood when you get it and say, I really like this area of the wood.*

Yes, but largely we cut up and process a lot of the wood, then I'll look carefully at it. By the time we get to the machining process to get them in shape we can see pretty good what it's going to look like. Usually this is a very noisy room. This is where we process the necks.

*How long does it take to bend the wood for the sides.*

About 15 minutes but it sits in there for about a day. They are all thermostatically heated and retain their shape. Over



there we're making a guitar rosette out of abalone. It's the ring on the guitar.

*That is going to look nice.*

Those are going to a company that sells them to luthiers. We do most of the luthiers that have been in business for 15-20 years. We don't do as many of the ones that have popped up in the last five years.

*You mentioned to me the other day that you've made two guitars and that you still own one of them.*



Yes, I'll go get it. Indian Rosewood with a mahogany neck and spruce top. Made in 86.

*An Ellis guitar. Of course it has perfect inlay in it.*

All done by hand on that one.

*And it has a great sound too...how old are these strings*

They're pretty old (laughter). It's an exact copy of a 000-28, but with a pointed cutaway and maple binding. It's got a good sound. I've found it more comfortable to play than my Martin. I've got a 53 D-28 that is a killer guitar.

*What size neck is this?*

It's a 1 and 11/16ths wide but it is a little fatter than I like.

*This is a beautiful and nice sounding guitar even with old strings. You should make more guitars!*

I thought about it. This might have been made around 86. I've never duplicated that peghead inlay but the fingerboard inlay subsequently became the Collings Mom inlay which I can show you.

*Why is it called the Mom inlay.*

I did one more custom inlay like this for Bill's mom. He made one guitar for his Mom with this inlay and then it became the Collings Mom.

*That's funny. Hey Tom, thank you for taking this time. I have learned a great deal.*

Anytime. Thank you.



# From the Mailbox

Concho Grass will be playing May 21st on the Rockwall County Courthouse lawn for the Rockwall Founders Day Concert from 11 am- 12:30 pm. [rockwallfoundersday.com](http://rockwallfoundersday.com) Sunday morning May 22nd at the Calvary East Baptist Church at 1700 E. Stark Rd right off of Seagoville Rd. They will be playing at the 11 am service. Hope you can make it. Ricky 325 650-8934



Hello, Gloria Brayshaw, Cell-254/718-9503 Email [gloriabrayshaw@gmail.com](mailto:gloriabrayshaw@gmail.com), Lessons at my home and will travel for a fee. I teach adults, no children please. I teach beginning and intermediate Bluegrass, Blues, Swing, Old-time etc. I have been playing Standup for over 35 years including 16 years in a working Band and I have been teaching for over 20 years. My People Play!



Eddie Collins member of CTBA has organized this Bluegrass event at Artz Rib House Sunday May 22nd as a fundraiser for Strictly Bluegrass and Under the X in Texas KOOP Radio DJ and band promoter Ted Branson. Ted needs a liver transplant after doctors found a cancer tumor there too large to remove. Medicare will cover liver costs but not the \$4000 a month for 6 months in pre and post transplant prescription drugs, \$300 a month for life after that..... Ted is on the waiting list but has been told without the funds cannot be given a liver. Donations are being accepted for a silent auction and tax deductible donations accepted thru chip in and by mail(info below). Here is link to Chip In website where tax deductible donations can be made thru PayPal. <http://tedbransonmedicalbenefit.chipin.com/ted-branson> Also here is physical address of bank if folks want to mail a check or drop off cash donations. Make payable to:

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God Bless! Pass this on. Thank You.



We lost another great Central Texas musician and friend of bluegrass. Howard Van Winkle, father of Don Van Winkle (longtime banjo player for San Antonio's Tennessee Valley Authority - bluegrass band) passed away April 19th. This email came from Ken Brown. "he was a pretty good friend and I jammed with him many times, especially at the little festival he ran at his place near Von Ormy.



# Where to go for a BLUEGRASS JAM!!!

(FOR A COMPLETE LIST CHECK THE CTBA WEBSITE)

## AUSTIN

Bluegrass Beginner/Intermediate JAM (CTBA Sponsored)  
1st. & 3rd Thu. 7-9 PM, (call for location)  
Contact: Steve Mangold (512) 345-6155

Bluegrass Beginner/Intermediate JAM (CTBA Sponsored)  
2nd & 4th Sat 4-6 PM; Slow Jam starts at 2:00PM ArtZ Rib House  
Contact: Steve Mangold (512) 345-6155

Bluegrass Intermediate/Advanced JAM (CTBA Sponsored)  
Sunday's 2-6PM, ArtZ Rib House, 2330 S. Lamar

Bluegrass All Levels Jam  
2nd and 4th Monday 7-11PM Waterloo Ice House (38th and Medical)  
Contact www.waterlooicehouse.com

BELLVILLE (Spring Creek Club Sponsored)  
Bluegrass All Levels JAM & SHOW  
Jan. thru Sept 4th Sat; 4pm JAM, 6:30 pm SHOW, Coushatta RV Ranch  
Contact: (979) 865-5250 bluegrass221@peoplepc.com www.springcreekbluegrass.com

BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION  
Brazos Country Grass  
Monday's 6-9PM, JJ. Cody's, 3610 S. College  
Contact: www.brazoscountrgrass.com

FAYETTEVILLE  
Bluegrass All Levels JAM (Texas Pickin' Park Sponsored)  
2nd Sat, April—November, starts at 6 PM, on the Courthouse Square  
Contact: info@texaspickinpark.com www.texaspickinpark.com

GEORGETOWN  
Bluegrass Jam All Levels  
every Thursday at Duke's BBQ Smokehouse, 6-8 PM,  
Contact: 512-869-8076 or sigi@sigi.us (www.sigi.us/rr)

GARLAND  
Bluegrass All Levels JAM  
Saturday, March- Nov, 7:30PM between Main & State St at 6th,  
Contact:

HARWOOD  
Bluegrass/Swing/Country JAM & Stage Show (Pot Luck too!)  
3rd Sat, 2-9 PM, 9 mi. E. of Luling, Hwy 90  
Contact: Tony Conyers (512) 601-1510 or (512) 940-3731

## HOUSTON

Bluegrass All Levels JAM  
2nd Sat, 1-4 PM, April-November, Houston Railroad Museum,  
Contact: (713) 319-8906 www.houstonrrmuseum.org

## LEAGUE CITY

Bluegrass All Levels JAM & SHOW 3rd Sat: Jam 5 PM (BABA Sponsored)  
Show 6:30 PM Jan- Nov.  
Contact: Rick Kirkland (President) (281) 488-2244

## MANCHACA

Bluegrass All Levels  
Manchaca Railroad Bar-B-Q, FM 1626, Every Thursday 6:30-9:00PM  
Contact: Dave (512) 680-4433

## PEARL JAM & SHOW,

1st Sat: Jam all day  
Contact: Ronald Medart (254) 865-6013 www.pearlbluegrass.com

## ROUND ROCK

Bluegrass All Levels  
Danny Ray's Music, 12 Chisholm Trail, RR, Third Saturday 2:00 PM

## SAN ANTONIO

Bluegrass Beginner/Intermediate JAM  
Grady's Barbeque at 7400 Bandera Rd. San Antonio. Monday's 6-8 PM  
Contact: Clifton Bowren (210) 602-5544 cliftonfiddler5@aol.com

## SHULENBURG

RV Park Community Center 1st & 3rd Tuesday, 6:30-9:00PM  
Contact: Loretta Baumgarten (979) 743-4388 Camp@SchulenburgRVPark.com

## WIMBERLEY

Bluegrass All Levels Jam  
Fri 8-12 PM, Rolling House Clubhouse  
Contact: Mike Bond

1st Friday each mo., Hondo Hootenanny, starts at 11 AM- Hondo Community Center,  
1014 18th st, Hondo, Tx Info 830 426 2831

1st Sat each mo, Field Creek Music - 6: PM -  
field Creek is between Llano and Brady on Hwy 71, Info call Bill Tuckness 325 247 3223

2nd Tuesday - Each Month, All Gospel Jam 6: PM,  
first Baptist Church - Medina, Tx, Call Linda Barton for info, 830 589 2486

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# Membership and Advertising Rates



CTBA's Volume 2

\$10.00

(includes shipping costs to anywhere in the United States)

<http://www.centraltexasbluegrass.org/merchandise.html>

Central Texas Bluegrass still have a few T-shirts remaining. They are 100% pre-shrunk cotton, high quality shirts with CTBA's logo on the front. Available in Navy Blue and White. Sizes are S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Only \$10.00



Take \$5.00 off the advertising rates if you are already ad business member. Copy deadline is the 15th of the month. Publication is on or about the 1st day of the each month. Send electronic notices to: [ctba@centraltexasbluegrass.org](mailto:ctba@centraltexasbluegrass.org) Send payment to:

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THE CENTRAL TEXAS BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION WHOSE MISSION IS TO PROMOTE BLUEGRASS MUSIC IN CENTRAL TEXAS.

Our members range from listeners and lovers of bluegrass music to world-class professional musicians who all have the same desire: to promote the music.

CTBA provides a link between clubs, restaurants, and other venues and Central Texas Bluegrass musicians.

CTBA sponsors jams, workshops, provides scholarships to needy musicians, donates to other non-profit organizations, supports radio stations that promote bluegrass music & musicians, and provide festival venues for our listeners and fans of bluegrass music to enjoy. KEEP ON PICKIN'

# Hire a Bluegrass Band!!!

*(Month & year of articles in Newsletter follow name)*

512

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brian\_m\_byrne@yahoo.com,

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christyfooster@earthlink.net

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don@inbody.net

**Chasing Blue (Sep'10)**  
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**L. Wayne Ross**  
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thelostpines@gmail.com  
www.lostpinesband.com

**Manchaca All-Stars (Nov'07, May'08)**  
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(512) 282-2756  
manchacaallstars@email.com

**One Came Bak**  
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210-663-2352  
Rebecca.graham77@yahoo.com

**Out of the Blue**  
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jamie5011@aol.com

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gus@vownet.net

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- May 7 Blacktop Bend, Green Mesquite (Southpark Meadows), 7:00pm
  - May 7 The Lost Pines, Green Mesquite (Barton Springs Rd), 7:00pm
  - May 7 The Sieker Band, German-Texan Heritage Society Maifest, 1:00pm
  - May 7 Karen Abrahams, Green Chai Café (Bastrop), 7:00pm
  - May 8 The Sieker Band, Black's BBQ (Lockhart), 1:00pm
  - May 11 Blacktop Bend, Jax Neighborhood Café, 6:30pm
  - May 14 HOUSE CONCERT, The Sieker Band (San Antonio), 4:30pm
  - May 15 Brian Byrne & Borrowed Time, (Marble Falls)
  - May 20 Bee Creek Boys, Ross' Old Austin Café, 6:30pm
  - May 21 John McEuen of Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, (Marble Falls)
  - May 21 The Sieker Band, Artz Rib House, 7:30pm
  - May 21 Blacktop Bend, Green Mesquite (Southpark Meadows), 7:00pm
  - May 22 Sarah Jarosz, One World Theater, 6pm & 8:30pm
  - May 22 Bluegrass Extravaganza Benefit for Ted Branson, Artz 3pm
  - May 26-June 12 Kerrville Folk Festival (see The Lost Pines!)
  - May 27 Blacktop Bend, Simplicity Wine Bar & Eats, 7:00pm
  - May 27 The Sieker Band, Dahlia Café (Liberty Hill), 6:30pm
  - May 28 Piney Grove Ramblers, Patsy's Cafe, 7:00pm
  - May 28 Out of the Blue, Uptown Marble Theater (Marble Falls)
  - May 28 BlueBell & Bluegrass Festival (Llano)
- CTBA BAND SCRAMBLE COMING JULY 3RD



## Central Texas Bluegrass Association

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