



Artwork by Emily Isbell

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Well we're a few days late as per usual, which means it's 2026 already. I'm optimistic, because the Bluegrass is strong in our little community here in Central Texas. On other hand, I of course have concerns about the year ahead. Mostly, I'm setting my sights on an exciting year for the CTBA. We're already hard at work on our 2026 events, and our Sunday jam is the strongest it's been in years. We had something like 45 pickers out yesterday! Four jam circles! Madness.

More on this below, but I'd like to offer personal congratulations to Loren Gunn and Ken Powers on their election to the CTBA Board of Directors. I'd also like to extend my personal thanks to Julian Root and Kyle Kline for their years of service to our little organization. Your watch has ended, please don't be a stranger.

Please join me in raising a glass to the year that was and the year that awaits us. It certainly won't be a dull one. Cheers!

Jon Lundbom
President, Central Texas Bluegrass

JOIN THE CTBA!



We can't possibly say it often enough - you (yes, you!) should **become a CTBA member** today!
#youyesyou

The CTBA is a membership organization, we are able to do what we do only so long as our membership is strong. CTBA membership is **cheap** - starting at only \$25/year - and comes with a **ton of benefits**. With even more benefits for **band** and **business** members! You can read about it all and sign up today at CentralTexasBluegrass.org/Join.

ANNUAL MEETING & SHOW RECAP

By Hannah Spooner-Giardino, CTBA Board Member



The 47th CTBA Annual Meeting was an absolute blast! We welcomed two new board members (more on that below) and enjoyed an afternoon packed with lots of jamming and sets by CTBA member-band **Lost Patterns** and our headliner, **Volume Five**. At one point there were at least five jam circles going at once, which says everything you need to know about the energy at the event. Huge thanks to **Meanwhile Brewing** for hosting us and helping make it such a fun, memorable day.





BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President



In 2026, the CTBA will welcome two new board officers, elected by the membership: **Loren Gunn** and **Ken Powers**. In addition, sitting officers **Jon Lundbom** (president) and **Lenny Nichols** (treasurer) were reelected. Thanks to everyone who ran and to all of the members who voted in the election, which saw the highest turnout in years! Thanks as

well to board member **Chelsea Burns** and CTBA members **Chris Murdock** and **Scott Stegall**, who volunteered to take part in the nominations committee. Finally, the board expresses its gratitude for our two departing officers, **Julian Root** and **Kyle Kline**, who have generously given their time to keep this organization thriving.

If you're a CTBA member, you could run for a seat on the board, too. Look out for notices next fall about the 2027-2028 board elections!

MEET YOUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Howdy! I'm **Loren Gunn**, and I've been a music lover all of my life. I found my way back to making music (and fell hard for bluegrass!) after picking up an old family mandolin a few years ago. My husband, Roam, and I joined the CTBA in 2021, and we've loved being a part of this wonderful community through jams, festivals, events, and playing with our band, **Across the Way**. I'm excited and honored to serve on the board and can't wait to help welcome new

folks and spread the bluegrass love across Central Texas.

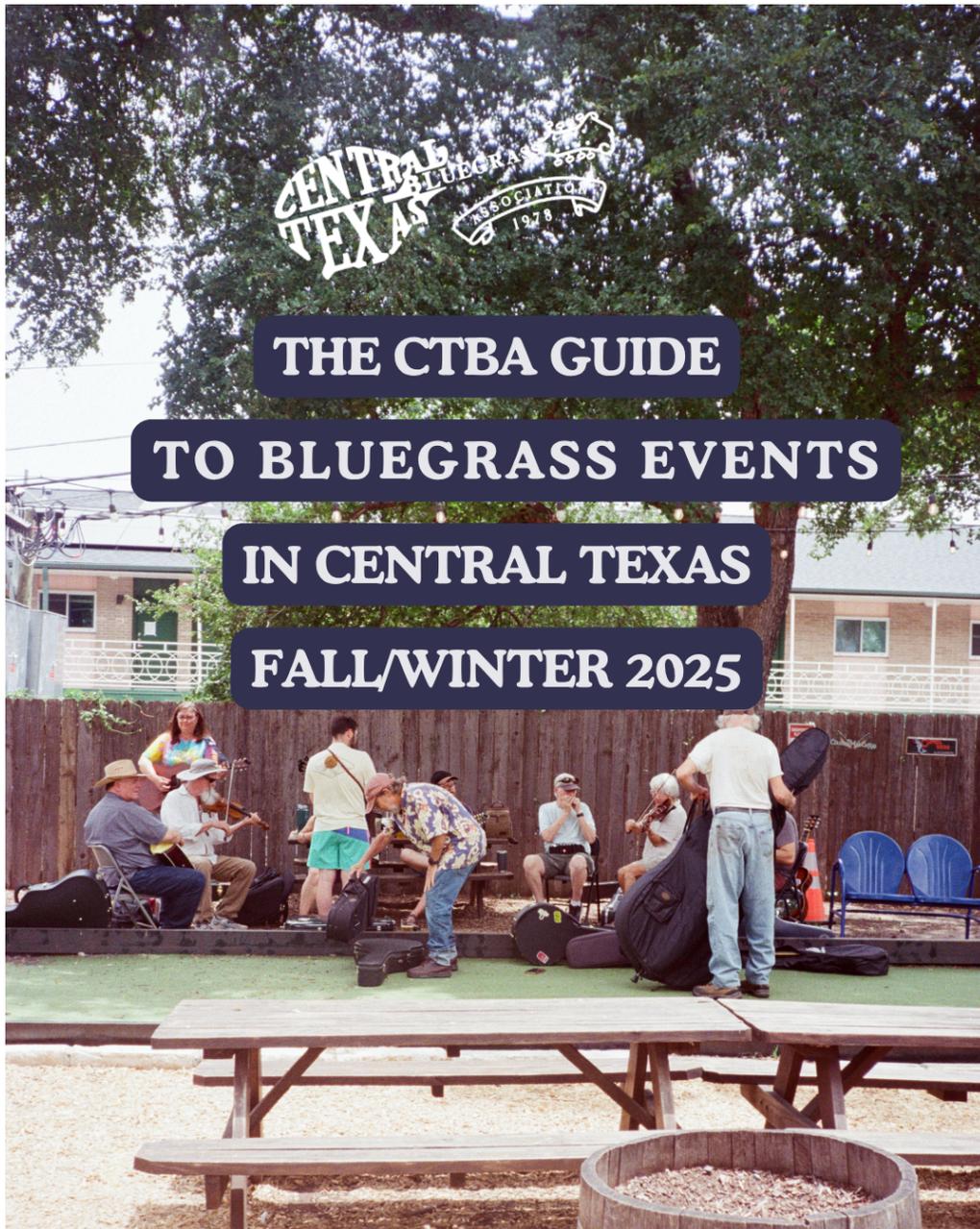
Thanks so much for welcoming me to the CTBA board. I've been a huge supporter of regional bluegrass community scenes for quite some time, and I'm really excited to get more involved with the Central Texas Bluegrass Association. Organizations like this are what keep these special, local scenes thriving. I've been living in Austin for a little over five years and originally hail from New England in the greater Boston area. Having lived in



different parts of the country, I've always been inspired by the unique local picking scenes and have very much enjoyed the extended community of wonderful like-minded folks in the Austin bluegrass world. - **Ken Powers**

FALL/WINTER BLUEGRASS GUIDE

In case you missed the news, the [CTBA Guide to Bluegrass Events in Central Texas](#) for **Fall/Winter 2025** is live! Hopefully there's still some relevant info, but if not the next edition is right around the corner. Check it out!



OLD SETTLERS MUSIC FEST 2026

By Chelsea Burns, CTBA Board Member

As you may have heard, **Old Settlers Music Festival** is returning to its previous home at **Camp Ben McCulloch** for **April 16-19, 2026!** This year's festival will feature camping and music both taking place on the grounds of Camp Ben, creating an intimate event in the camp's idyllic setting. It'll include all of your favorite Old Settler's elements: stage shows from local and touring acts, jamming in the campground, a youth talent competition, and vendors.

Want to get involved with a great group of folks and save money on a ticket? You can sign up for information on volunteer opportunities at **OldSettlersMusicFest.org/Volunteer-Interest**.

Tickets, lineup, and camping information are all available at **OldSettlersMusicFest.org**.

39TH ANNUAL



**OLD SETTLERS'S
MUSIC FESTIVAL**
2026

APRIL 17-19

FEATURING

RAILROAD EARTH • THE BROTHERS COMATOSE
THE LAST REVEL • LINDSAY LOU • SHINYRIBS
MICHAEL CLEVELAND & FLAMEKEEPER
SHELBY MEANS • TWO RUNNER • MAGOO
WARREN HOOD QUARTET WITH EMILY GIMBLE
BILLY BRIGHT BAND • FOGGY MEMORY BOYS
FEEDING LEROY • BROTHER THUNDER
LOUISIANA SURF DEPARTMENT • IRA THORNE CLIFTON
(2025 YOUTH TALENT CONTEST WINNER)

AND MORE!

CAMP BEN ☾ DRIFTWOOD, TX

OLDSETTLERSMUSICFEST.ORG

DONKEYGRASS 2026

And - what's that? - we have a lineup for **Donkeygrass 2026!** Earlybird tickets are on sale until **January 15th**, so head on over to Cabin10.org and grab yours ASAP.

Cabin 10 Presents
Ray Bonneville | The Cary Swinney Trio
Billy Bright, Alan Munde & Elliott Rogers
Tony Kamel | Dennis Ludiker & The A-Team
Frankie J. Meyer | Elliott Rogers and Digger Brown
Meadow Makers | Righteous Intonation
Anna La Mare | Jacob Kyle & The Bluesbonnets
Eric Gerber Three | Marc Utter | Christopher Cody Meacham

Donkey Grass
March 27-29, 2026
Edits Family (background)
Koster TV

Early Bird Tickets 1/1 - 1/16, 2026 at www.cabin10.org



LOSSES: GABE HIRSCHFELD

By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President

Note: the Bluegrass world writ large suffered a titanic blow last week with the untimely and unexpected loss of banjo player/human being extraordinaire Gabe Hirschfeld. I knew Gabe a little bit, and I had the same wonderful things to say about him that so many of us did. CTBA Vice-President Simon Waxman, however, knew him incredibly well. I asked Simon's permission to run this remembrance here, and I thank Simon for sharing. May his memory be a blessing. - Jon

Been thinking a lot about our dear friend Gabe the past couple days. Watching the many loving tributes pour in has been a balm.

To me, Gabe represents the deepest power of community, especially the particular solidarity that forms around bluegrass music. That solidarity was crystallized in Gabe's exquisite way of being in the world. Over the course of fifteen years of acquaintance, I came to realize that Gabe had given his old life to bluegrass and that the music provided in return a new life of social fulfillment. He found bluegrass in high school, the same high school I had gone to a few years earlier. He told me when we first met that he had been very alone there, which didn't surprise me. If you were a little off-center, a little imperfect, a little too unconcerned with which brands you wore or which Ivy you'd attend, well that place didn't have much time or space for you. Maybe you'd find your clutch of misfits, but you could just as easily be dust and cobwebs, nothing.

In the bluegrass world, in contrast, Gabe earned respect, even devotion. He was accomplished and was recognized as such. The truly accomplished don't splash their names on buildings, beg for credit, whine about the prizes they haven't won. They handle themselves like Gabe did, without ego and arrogance. They pay respect forward because all of us deserve it, just for being here. He continually and actively invited others in. Yes, he possessed a seemingly effortless magnetism—such a wit, the funniest banjo player on a planet that's also home to Steve Martin. But it wasn't just Gabe assuredly being himself, at least, not always. He put in effort on behalf of others. He was invested in all of us having new life, together. So he tolerated the squeaks and squeals of lesser players like myself, then called the next tune and made sure it made it all the way around the circle. These were inspiring acts of grace and kindness and welcome.



I don't want to forget Gabe's artistry. It was so complete, and it manifested his humility and maturity. Listen to those two principal Lonely Heartstring Band albums: he's everywhere and barely there. The banjo, in bluegrass, is as frontal an instrument as you'll find, but Gabe only rarely occupies the foreground. Instead, he's building the foundation, over and over, with every bend and roll.

I didn't know it at the time, but hearing Gabe on the banjo a decade ago and more reorganized my ears. When I first heard and picked with Gabe, I knew he was the real thing because it sounded like he was "better" than Earl or Crowe or Ralph. He could pick like Bela Fleck and Tony Trischka and Alison Brown. Back then, I was obsessed with Noam Pikelny's "In the Maze" album and was astonished to find that this kid could hack that kind of thing, too. But then, if it was a slow night at the Cantab, I'd ask Gabe to unpack a cool lick he'd come up with. (That I even discerned that cool lick owes much to the fact that Gabe was constantly creating them, expanding my sense of what a banjo could sound like.) He'd demonstrate how he constructed the lick from Earl's parts, or combined a couple of Crowe's embellishments and added a twist inspired by Don Reno, whom I'd never heard of. Gabe could hear every possibility in the great well of tones. He took inspiration from the weird and wild and progressive and from modern Scruggs masters too, folks like Jim Mills. In Gabe's playing, there were no orthodoxies, which is why he sounded like no one but himself. He loved learning from his peers and predecessors and from there contributed novel approaches to that most basic question of musicianship: How do I get from here to there, and make it interesting along the way?

Through his model and his enthusiasm for the full sweep of bluegrass, Gabe helped me shed my pretensions. His way of music stuck. And the lessons I took were about more than banjo licks. What we hear in Gabe's art, what we'll keep hearing on recordings and in memories, is a profound reality: evolution isn't progress; it's change. No one was better than Earl, he said, before going on to learn everything he could from all of Earl's elaborators. Evolution isn't progress; it's change. Gabe expressed this truth in his music and lived up to its implications through the beneficence he showed our damaged world.

I've never admired a friend more. He will be cherished always, a permanent resident of the Chill Zone.

ON REPEAT

By Loren Gunn, CTBA Board Member

Happy New Year! I'm excited to be here writing to you as a new member of the CTBA board. To kick things off, here's three albums and three songs from each that I've had on repeat lately. Have you listened to these albums? I'd love to hear what you think.



Heart of a Singer (1998)

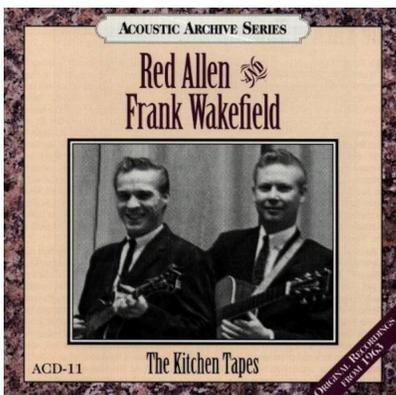
Hazel Dickens, Carol Elizabeth Jones, Ginny Hawker

Listen [here](#)

I've been listening to this one thanks to a recommendation from **Beth Chrisman**, one half of CTBA member-band **Lost Patterns** and self-proclaimed Hazel-Nut. Jody Stecher once described this album as "a hardcore mountain vocal album for the turn of the

century, one whose roots go well into the last" and that feels exactly right. Current favorites (two waltzes? Don't mind if I do):

- **Love Me or Leave Me Alone** - these three women's voices together are a force with which to be reckoned
- **Faded Pressed Rose** - a heartfelt interpretation of a traditional family song
- **Old Memories Mean Nothing to Me** - Steve Young's song with Hazel on tenor



The Kitchen Tapes (1963)

Red Allen and Frank Wakefield

Listen [here](#)

Recorded in Frank Wakefield's kitchen, this lo-fi, duet masterclass lets you hear the life in the room, the off hand commentary between the musicians, and all the fun edges. I'm told most of the takes that made it to the album were the first ones. I had heard several tracks from this album, but sat down with the whole

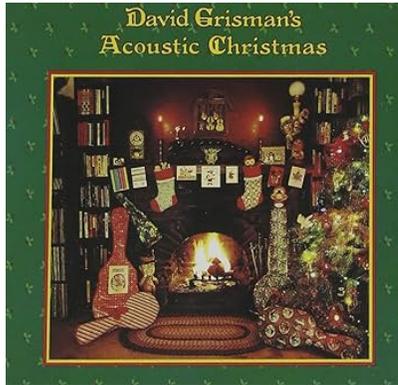
thing when Michael Daves hosted an in-depth class on it. Highly recommend his classes if you ever get the chance!

These tracks show off why this album still gets studied (and why David Grisman literally wore through several copies of these tapes learning the solos)...

- **I'm Just Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail** - Monroe style solos and sassy-frassy fills

- **Down in the Willow Garden** - a groovy, arpeggio heavy take on a jam favorite
- **Crying Heart Blues** - my most played track of the year, it's short but that's ok it sounds nice on repeat in the car
- **Talk to Your Heart** - a catchy cover of Ray Price's 1953 recording, with an added harmony to live for

Well, ok, I went over and that's four. I didn't even get to the instrumentals like **Turkey in the Straw**, **Bluegrass Stomp**, **Roanoke**, **Billy in the Lowground**, and **Rawhide**. Maybe next time.



David Grisman's Acoustic Christmas (1983)

Listen [here](#)

I take mandolin lessons with Wayne Benson (check him out on YouTube) and during our last hour, he first asked if I had been listening to or playing any Christmas music and then recommended this album. I admitted that I always wait until a little too late in the year to start and end up trying to learn them all on

Christmas eve. This year, I had a couple week runway...

- **What Child Is This?** - the only sad part is that it's just 58 seconds
- **God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen** - in gorgeous 6/8 time
- **I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas** - all tone, timing, and taste

Ok, that's three albums and three-ish songs from each. Send your favorite tracks from these albums, tell me other albums that remind you of these, or what you're listening to at AcrossTheWayMusic@Gmail.com.

SPINNING WAX

By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President



For Central Texas stalwarts, this may be a little nostalgic. Any fans of the Hays County Gals and Pals out there? Well, now I'm one, too.

There's a lot to love in the band's 1994 album, *Take Me Back*, which I'll admit isn't precisely bluegrass. It's tempting to describe this as an intersection of bluegrass and western music, pairing mandolin, fiddle, and dobro with mustangs and cattle drives. But if you skin this cat a little differently, the relationship feels more like one of inheritance than fusion. Western music is in the genes of bluegrass; it featured prominently in the well of song from which the first grassers drew. Listen to 1930s star Patsy Montana, say, and you're hearing the kind of radio hit that inspired the Monroe Brothers, a couple of Kentuckians who donned cowboy hats and jodhpurs and occasionally fringes in an era when the myth and romance of the western plain was at the heart of American popular culture.

Take Me Back, as the title implies, restores us to that moment. But it's not wistful. The record is vigorous, full of élan. Lead vocalist Jill Jones sets the tone with confident performances across the full length of the work. With harmonies from bassist Ginger Evans, fiddling from Mike Fowler and Eric Hokkanen, and multi-instrumental wizarding by Greg Lowry, The Hays County Gals and Pals shimmer all night long in the prairie moon.

Speaking of which, one of many nice cuts here is the loping, gliding "Prairie Moon." It's a legato showcase, with slick dobro and double fiddling. "Ridin' Down the Canyon" is another laconic tune, setting a nice easy pace. But this album isn't all striders. "Pinto Pal" and "Wagon Wheels" have the bounce and the drive we love, not to mention gold-medal achievements in yodeling. "Round Up Time," meanwhile, has the soul of a hornpipe and gets the toes pleasantly aflutter. I'm especially fond of the band's rendition of "Ridin', Ropin'," a Roy Rogers number with a minor-key verse and major-key

chorus, which provides a harmonic change of pace. Two of the tracks are Australian

This would have been a fun band to see live. Who's up for a reunion around the campfire?

You can hear [**Take Me Back \(1994\)**](#) in its entirety on YouTube.

SUSTO STRINGBAND

CTBA Member-Band Feature

Justin Osborne has been performing as **Susto** since 2013, when he formed a collective of fellow musicians and artists in coastal Charleston, South Carolina. Now a bona-fide emissary of alt-rock and treasure to the indie crowd, a lifelong calling coupled with a cosmic push of serendipitous happenstance led to his latest venture: **Susto Stringband** joined by Americana vocalist **Clint Roberts**, clawhammer banjoist **Helena Rose**, and upright bassist **Joey Brown** (now **Holler Choir**).

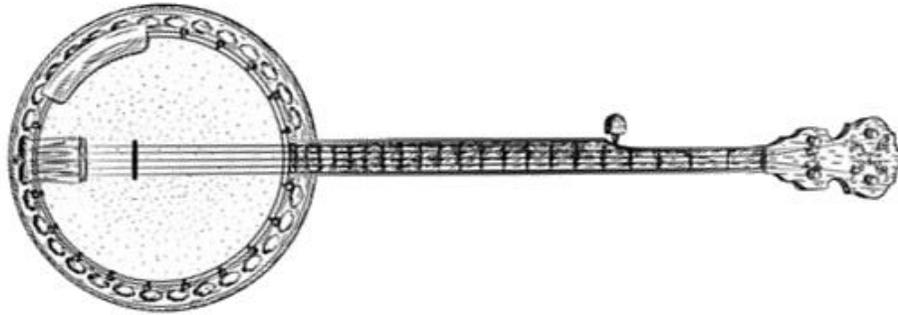


Lightning struck as an immediate connection and artistic chemistry captured a new sound and visualization that unfolds on Susto Stringband's debut release from New West Records, simply titled ***Susto Stringband: Volume 1***. Nine of Osborne's ballads, refrains and heart wrenching confessions, now drenched in the singular Appalachian sound of Holler Choir's verdant harmonies and stringed arrangements. Still, steeped in the emotive punch of the traditional string band sound, Susto Stringband presents an Arcadia like vision of pastoralism and and harmony with nature, but with Osborne's lyrics, there are landmines to dodge and mountains to climb.

Find them online at SustolsReal.com

CTBA MEMBER-BANDS

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



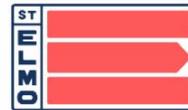
[Across the Way](#)
[Bird Calls](#)
[Black Diamond](#)
[Bobby Giles & Texas Gales](#)
[BuffaloGrass](#)
[Dalton Harper Band](#)
[Four Fights Per Pint](#)
[The Greenlawn Rangers](#)
[Gus Miller & The Buzz Killers](#)
[Livermore](#)

[Long Prairie](#)
[Lost Patterns](#)
[The McKinleys](#)
[Randy Collier & Grassland](#)
[The Sieker Band](#)
[Strawberry Flats](#)
[Susto Stringband](#)
[Sylvan River Band](#)
[Wayside Bluegrass](#)

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

CTBA BUSINESS MEMBERS

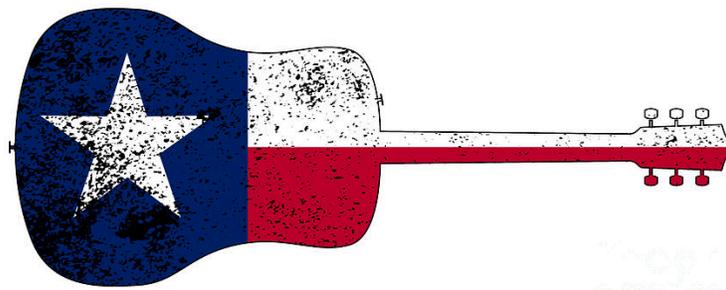
The CTBA is proud to have the following **businesses** as members, please consider supporting them as they support Bluegrass in Central Texas!



[Barton Springs Mill](#)
[Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches](#)
[Cabin 10](#)

[Old Settlers Music Fest](#)
[Shades of Bluegrass](#)
[St. Elmo Brewing Co.](#)

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



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