



Artwork by Emily Isbell

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CTBA SUNDAY JAM NAMED BEST OF AUSTIN BY THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

We are so excited to share that our Sunday jam at Batch was recognized by the Austin Chronicle. We won the award for "Best Place to Fiddle Around." Let's keep jamming and living up to the accolade!

[See the award page](#)

SAVE THE DATE: 48TH CTBA ANNUAL MEETING

When: Sunday, November 8th

Where: St. Elmo Brewing (Springdale Location)

What: Annual CTBA Board Elections, open jamming, and a featured performance by SPGMA's 2025 International Band Contest winners, [Riley Gilbreath and Lone Star Blue](#)

Mark your calendars! We're heading to St. Elmo Brewing on Springdale for an afternoon of voting, picking, and incredible music. Keep an eye on our social media channels and upcoming newsletters as we get closer to the date for official times and the full schedule. See y'all there!

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.

2026 MEMORIAL FEST

By Hannah Spooner-Giardino, CTBA Board Member

What a day at CTBA Memorial Fest!

Thanks to everyone who came out to pick, listen, and hang out. At one point there were five huge jam circles, and the day closed out with a great set from Bobby Giles and Texas Gales.

Huge shoutout to Batch for hosting us and keeping everyone fueled. There is truly nothing better than this community showing up to do what they love. See y'all at the next one! 🙌 (and check out the video recap below)



EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES



Pete Wernick a.k.a. "Dr. Banjo" is one of the most influential figures in bluegrass. Pete is a co-founder of Hot Rize, the inaugural president of the IBMA, and a 2025 inductee into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame. In 2010, he launched the Wernick Method, a teaching approach built around a simple idea: the fastest way to learn bluegrass is to play it with other people. Since then, his certified instructors have taught more than 10,000 students across dozens of states and countries.

There are two exciting opportunities for Wernick Method classes coming to Austin this Fall. First up, brand-new to Austin, a six-week course taught by Jon Lundbom, starting September 2nd and meeting Wednesdays from 6-9 p.m. at the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection in central Austin. All instruments and all levels are welcome, and an early signup discount is available.

Second, the Wernick Method returns for a weekend intensive taught by John David, running Saturday and Sunday, October 17-18, at Pioneer Farms in northeast Austin. Again, all instruments and all levels are welcome, and an early signup discount is available.

Information on both classes is available at <http://letspick.org>. We'll see y'all there!



presents

Kym Warner

Ensemble Playing



Saturday, July 11

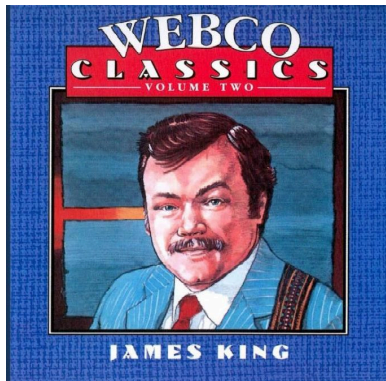
2:00 pm

You may know Kym as the guy in Robert Earl Keen's band, but his Greencards have three Grammy nominations and a #1 Billboard Bluegrass Album among their accolades. And he's been inducted into his music hall of fame back home in South Australia. Join Kym for a one-day class on how to play bluegrass music well as a group. How to support other musicians, playing back-up, knowing how to lead a jam session well. [Class details here.](#)

ON REPEAT

By Loren Gunn, CTBA Board Member

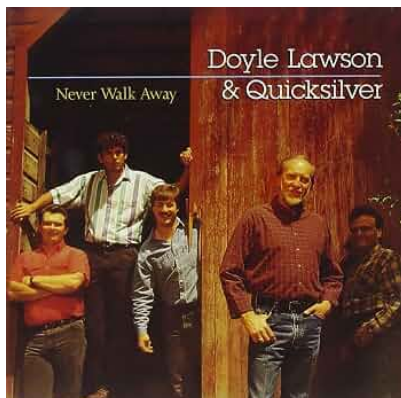
This quarter, we're outsourcing our earworms to [Riley Gilbreath](#) of Riley Gilbreath and Lone Star Blue. The band will be our upcoming November annual meeting headliner and are SPGMA's 2025 International Band Contest winner! Here are two of the songs Riley has been listening to on repeat lately:



You're Still to Blame (1994)

James King

First up is James King's cut of the Stanley Brothers tune, "[You're Still to Blame](#)." Riley notes that it puts a soulful twist on the original with a powerful high tenor and mid-range lead vocal. "Also," he adds, "the fiddle and mandolin fills are soulful, right out front, and really make the whole cut powerful." You can also check out the classic [Stanley Brothers version](#) here.



I'll Never Go Back (1995)

Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver

The second track guaranteed to cause some serious involuntary musical mind loops is Doyle Lawson's "[I Could Never Walk Away](#)." For Riley it's the energizing tempo and unique melody: "It's right on the verge of being more progressive for my taste, but it's cool for that exact reason. It's reserved just enough to stay traditional in the ways I like best."

There you have it. Give those a listen, or two hundred. And you also might check out what is certain to be on heavy rotation in our household, Riley's new album, [Time Takes a Toll](#).

We hope to see you all at the jam soon, but definitely make sure you come out to see Riley Gilbreath and Lone Star Blue at the CTBA annual meeting in November!

SPINNING WAX

By Simon Waxman, CTBA Vice-President



Out in aptly named Levelland, Texas, just west of Lubbock, the biggest things going are dust, [UFO sightings](#), and South Plains College. While I won't claim to be an expert in the school's academic offerings, I can confidently say that South Plains is unusually well-known in at least one field of endeavor, and that's bluegrass.

The source of South Plains' fame in the bluegrass world is its program in Commercial Music. Founded in 1975, the department quickly blossomed and diversified, welcoming future stars of rock, pop, and country (does Lee Ann Womack ring any bells?), as well as students focused on recording, production, and The Industry. Budding grassers were plentiful, too, and long before Olympic-level axe-slingers like Alan Munde and Joe Carr joined the faculty. From the starting gun, a chicken-pickin' Nebraska transplant named John Hartin directed the South Plains country and western ensemble, which brought together a handful of students who, in 1976, formed a bluegrass band with a classy sound you may just like. They were called, humbly enough, South Plains Bluegrass.

The group comprised a clutch of multi-instrumentalists, many of whom sang. Student members included Rick Dennington, later a stalwart of the West Texas group Southern Comfort, on mandolin and guitar; Debbie Wells, a guitarist, singer, and one of vanishingly few women who got her chance in the genre at the time; Tim McCasland on banjo, guitar, and dobro; and Gary Perkins on bass. Gary Wackerly, an established Oklahoma fiddler known for his work with the Blue Mountain Boys, crossed state lines to join up. Hartin himself, who passed away earlier this year, recorded on the group's first album, *Rebel Soldier*.

That record is hard to find, but the band's self-titled second effort has proven slightly more collectible, perhaps because it does feature one famous name: engineer Lloyd Maines. The future living legend and The Chicks dad put *South Plains Bluegrass* to tape in a Lubbock studio. The result is, in many respects, choice stuff. This disc features stellar lead vocals, tasteful dobro, richly toneful (if occasionally sloppy) mandolin, happy hippie harmonies, and some of the most "up" gospel this side of the pearly gates. And let's not forget the best part: McCasland's banjo playing. Alongside enthusiastic Scruggs picking, McCasland delivers textbook work in the melodic style—fitting, since he would go on to teach in the program where he had been a student.

The album opens with one of its strongest tracks, an original number from Perkins called "Mountain in the Sky," which puts McCasland's skill on immediate display. After that, we get a handful of warhorses, including a nice rendition of the Stanley Brothers' "If That's the Way You Feel," featuring delicious four-part harmony. Don't skip the instrumental chestnut "Gold Rush," where McCasland shines again. The A-side closes with the brisk and affirming spiritual, "Joshua," carried cheerfully by Wells and a gang of fellow singers.

The best song on *South Plains Bluegrass* is "The Wall," which opens side B. Though marred somewhat by jittery mandolin timing—a condition with which some of us (ahem) are all too familiar—this is nonetheless a high-test and highly playable jammer performed with gusto. The wall in question surrounds the penitentiary from which our hero yearns to escape; it's a narrative that fits bluegrass to a tee, though also one that we don't hear everyday. Ah, refreshment. Once more, McCasland shows off his abilities, picking relentless Scruggs-style backup and launching here and there into upsurging melodic riffs. He seems to be [text painting](#) the would-be prison breaker, scaling the titular wall.

More treats follow. The Monroe classic "In Despair" features a distinctive shuffle baseline, and the cover of Delaney & Bonnie's "Never Ending Love" brings flower power to bluegrass. Texans, and others, will groove to the intricate banjo-led instrumental version of "San Antonio Rose." Handling double duty on dobro (dang!), McCasland gets it right again, jumping out ahead of the break and slithering away. This is the only track featuring lead guitar, and it sounds like we like: thick and clipped and brassy. Another gospel number, "Born Again," finds Wells in the lead once more. It's a brief melodic roller coaster with the whole team joining in. Fittingly, the album closes with McCasland in the driver's seat on Jimmy Martin's "Tennessee." I don't know who is taking the lead here, but his impersonation of Martin's growling and pitch-bending acrobatics makes for a satisfying homage.

Don't look to these flatlanders for perfection. Some of the mandolin work is just too flawed, and one wonders if that alone condemned *South Plains Bluegrass* to relative obscurity. In the late 1970s, virtuosity was becoming bluegrass's calling card, with fans proving increasingly intolerant of the grit formerly known as soul. And on certain tracks, the timing problems really do make for gnashing of teeth and rending of garments. If you can power through, though—perhaps aboard that banjo motorboat—the rewards are ample.

📢 NEW MERCH ALERT! 📢



Back by popular demand, our favorite CTBA corduroy hats have returned! Find them for purchase at the Sunday Jam or a CTBA event soon.



BLUEGRASS JUNCTION

Performa/Dance is remounting "Bluegrass Junction" this August, pairing live bluegrass with folk dance in a show choreographed by Jennifer Hart. The piece draws on square dancing, clogging, jigs, and reels, tracing the dance traditions that grew up alongside American folk music. Performances are August 14th & 15th at the Austin Ventures StudioTheater (501 W. 3rd St, Austin) with ticket prices from \$35 to \$55.

"Bluegrass Junction" features live music from CTBA member-band Wayside Bluegrass along with special guest Tim Eriksen, a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist from Amherst, MA. Tickets are on sale July 1st, for tickets and more information, please visit PerformaDance.org/Bluegrass-Junction.

A LETTER FROM ACROSS THE POND

Bob Ingham, Rainford Junction Festival Organisers

Hello to our fellow bluegrassers across the pond! Almost half the population of our corner of northern England left home between 1715 and 1785 and settled in the hills of Appalachia, carrying the music that would become bluegrass. So when an idea for a youth fund took root here in Rainford, it felt fitting to share it with you. Like our ancestors, we're just trying to keep the music alive for the next generation, only this time the ocean between us is no obstacle at all.

It started last July, after a picking weekend called Bresfest, when my friend and mentor Tony Cooney handed me the reins to organize the next one. I wanted to build something around young players, so I pitched the idea to Stu Williams, Education Officer at the British Bluegrass Music Association. He thought our target of 20 youngsters was ambitious, but once he heard who we already had lined up, he was in. The festival, and the youth fund behind it, was born. From there it grew quickly. We formed a Community Interest Company, built a website at rainfordjunction.com, and lined up five experienced musicians to lead scratch bands of young players for a Saturday Night Gala. A partnership with Friends of American Old Time Music and Dance gave us a second camp for old-time music alongside bluegrass, and Rainford Junction Bluegrass and Old Time Festival now has a date: July 2nd to 5th, 2026.

The fundraising side took off too. We've sponsored several young musicians to attend Sorefingers, secured a bursary to a sailing-week music course in the Scottish Isles, and picked up grant support along the way, including £3,200 from the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund to run a shuttle bus and a schools program for marginalized communities. All told, we've raised over £7,500, with seven different funding programs now in the works, from one-on-one tuition to international exchanges.

We're just getting started, and we'd love for you to follow along. You can subscribe to our newsletter or check out the youth fund at rainfordjunction.com, and if you're able to chip in, even a small donation helps us find the next Billy Strings in the north of England.

Reach us anytime at youthfund@rainfordjunction.com. Thanks for letting us share our story, and thanks, as ever, for giving the world bluegrass.



Joe Newton-Kelsey (19)



Tom Hague (14)



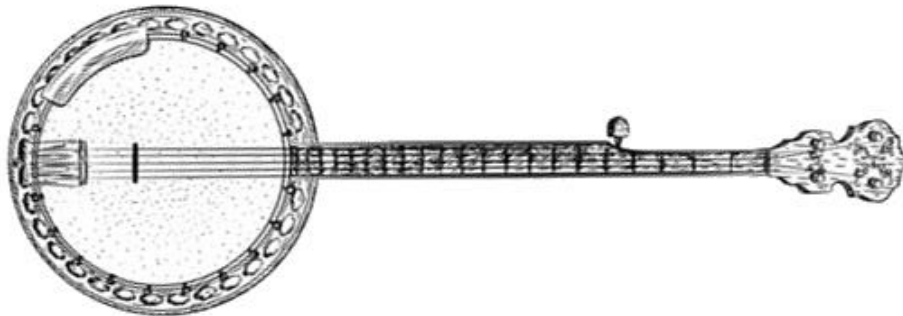
James Dunleavy (22)



Erin Croke (17)

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
Four Fights Per Pint
The Greenlawn Rangers
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

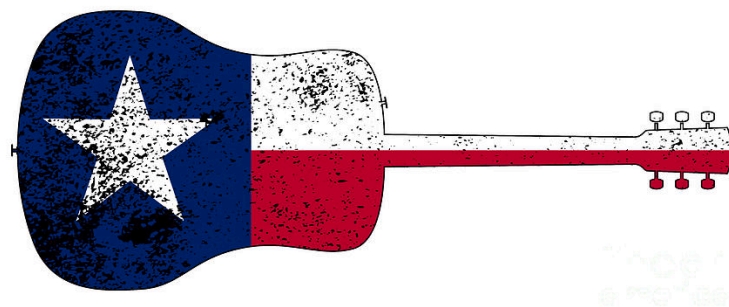


The CTBA is proud to have the following **businesses** as members, please consider supporting them as they support Bluegrass in Central Texas!

Barton Springs Mill
Batch Craft Beer & Kolaches
Cabin 10

Shades of Bluegrass
St. Elmo Brewing Co.
Cloud Tree Studios & Gallery

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**.



Central Texas Bluegrass | P.O. Box 9816 | Austin, TX 78766-0816 US

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