



AMERICAN BANJO MUSEUM QUARTERLY

Fall 2023

BANJO FEST

Review

Message From
the Executive
Director

Candy Cane
Christmas

Banjo Goes
Hollywood

Jim Henson's
87th Birthday
Celebration

Membership



2023 BANJO FEST REVIEW

Back in 1998, our museum's benefactor, Jack Canine, had a meeting of the minds with Guthrie Jazz Banjo Festival promoter and museum founder, Brady Hunt, their common goal being the establishment of a four-string banjo hall of fame. Each having a particular individual in mind, Canine and Hunt drafted a plan to honor both Sandy Riner and Marvin "Smokey" Montgomery as the first inductees into the National Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame. As years passed, more and more of the pioneers of the four-string banjo as well as contemporary figures who carried on the traditions of their predecessors were honored with hall of fame induction. However, as the museum grew in both size and musical scope, embracing all styles of the banjo, players and music, it became apparent that the hall of fame must adapt as well. As such, in 2014, with the inclusion of its first five-string banjo inductee, Earl Scruggs, the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame began, in earnest, its mission of honoring banjos best from the genres of jazz, bluegrass, folk, classic and old-time music. While sometimes scoffed at by critics, each successive year has found the Hall of Fame becoming increasingly accepted and respected by the worldwide banjo community. To date, nearly 100 inductees have been honored for their contributions to the art and industry of the banjo.

It was in that spirit that plans were made to honor the 2023 inductees to the American Banjo Museum. Beginning with the lengthy suggestion, nomination and voting process late in 2022, new inductees Kurt Abell, Buck Trent, Norbert Pietsch, Akira Tsumura and the family of Grandpa Jones were notified of the honor - and then the real work began. With the dates of October 12-14, 2023 blocked off on everyone's calendar, the complex process of

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BANJO FEST 2023



9 East Sheridan Ave.
Oklahoma City, OK 73104
405-604-2793
AmericanBanjoMuseum.com

MISSION

The mission of the American Banjo Museum is to preserve and promote the banjo while expanding appreciation and understanding of its history and music.

STAFF

Johnny Baier, Executive Director
Margie Smith-Robbins, Assistant Administrator
Tyler Jackson, Assistant Curator
Sherril Mitchell, Reception
Ellie Burns, Administrative Assistant
Lucas Ross, Community Outreach & Promotion Coordinator
Kelcie Lee, Staff

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researching and gathering photos, videos and audio recordings of each honoree was the first step in a long production process. While October seemed like a long time away, producing five separate induction videos can be a daunting task. Additionally, a host hotel and event venue needed to be secured along with addressing all of the catering, transportation and other logistical details. Finally, in mid-September invitations went out and the anticipation of yet another BANJO FEST weekend was reaching a high pitch.

In addition to the Hall of Fame induction ceremony itself, the BANJO FEST weekend includes a variety of different events, each of which illustrate an ongoing learning curve from one year to the next. A perennial favorite is the Thursday evening welcome reception at the museum. While repeat visitors always enjoy seeing the museum again, for many guests this will be their first impression of what we have worked so hard to present since opening our doors in OKC in 2009. This year's celebration kicked off with live music from Hall of Fame members Gary "Biscuit" Davis and Lee Floyd (joined by ABM board of directors member, Danny Rubio), followed by one of our international guests, Sean Moyses (arriving a day late but fully charged from England). With music and camaraderie flowing freely, the spirit of Thursday's party set the tone for the entire weekend that lay ahead.

On Friday, while the ABM staff was coordinating the logistics of that evening's Hall of Fame inductions, banjo students - eager to learn from the best, were treated to workshops hosted by Tyler



Jackson, Gary "Biscuit" Davis, Bill Dendle, Lee Floyd and Sean Moyses. Then at the prescribed hour everyone gathered at the top of OKC's spectacular Devon Tower for the main event...the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame inductions. After walking the red carpet, guests were awed by the amazing views and music during the social hour. Upon entering the Infinity Room, a string quartet provided a musical "cleansing of the palate" after and prior to a weekend devote to the joyous noise of the banjo. Following the dinner service, ABM executive director, Johnny Baier, joined by board president, Doug Parsons, commenced the business of the evening, welcoming board members, sponsors, special musical guests, past Hall of Fame inductees and, of course, this year's honorees. Each 2023 inductee was introduced to the audience through a video recap of their lives and careers specially produced for the event by the ABM. Musical tributes for honorees were provided by Bill Dendle, Shelley Burns, Randy Morris and Evan Dain (for Kurt Abell), Larry Sledge (for Grandpa Jones), Gary "Biscuit" Davis (for Buck Trent), Sean Moyses and Tyler Jackson (for Norbert Pietsch), and Lee Floyd and Danny Rubio (for Akira Tsumura). During a ceremony which often resembles an emotional roller coaster where the sentiments expressed by each inductee are always heartfelt and genuine, the evening's highlight came when legendary banjo collector, Akira Tsumura from Japan, declared his honor to be "the most wonderful moment of my life!"

Following the ceremony, everyone congregated at the museum for a special jam session which allowed players of all levels to be a significant musical part of the weekend. Although a big day was ahead (and a long day was already behind most), the jam session went on until 1AM, allowing everyone just enough sleep before the BRICKTOWN BANJO BASH which was to follow.

An ongoing goal of the BANJO FEST weekend is to share the music we love with the public. This year, four venues featuring free admission shared some of the best banjo music in the world with the locals and tourists visiting Bricktown. From two stages at the ABM to restaurant venues including the Bourbon Street Cafe as well as The Joinery, the great afternoon of banjo music was only eclipsed by the partial solar eclipse taking place outside.

As a finale for the weekend, Saturday evening saw the museum's event room transformed into an old-fashioned Shakey's Pizza Parlor with sing along entertainment provided by Johnny Baier and Randy Morris (both veterans of the Shakey's of long ago). With pizza and beer on the tables - and the words to old favorite sing along songs projected on the wall, the nostalgic road trip was a perfect end to a wonderful weekend.

And now that BANJO FEST 2023 is a fond memory, it's time to reset the clock and begin planning for next year...
SAVE THE DATES - OCTOBER 10-13, 2024, for next year's BANJO FEST!



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Looking back to 2008 when we were in the planning stages of the American Banjo Museum in Oklahoma City, believing that the story would never change, the consensus was to make a grand first impression by devoting a large portion of our exhibit budget to the presentation of the early chapters of banjo history in a costly multimedia presentation with all the bells and whistles. At the time we went to great lengths to make our telling of early banjo history both historically accurate and enlightening, particularly to visitors who knew little or nothing about the banjo's 400+ year evolution. Our script, which was vetted and approved by banjo historians and ethnomusicologists - both black and white, sensitively addressed racially charged topics associated with the banjo such as minstrelsy and the white culture's appropriation of the instrument as its own in the late 1800s. I still recall with great pride our opening day and the universally positive response to what had become a very costly exhibit which we felt would have permanence in the museum. However, as years passed, while the history of the banjo had not changed, the manner in which our society is willing to accept the presentation of its history had. Certain words and phrases used in our story evolved into the realm of being perceived by certain

visitors as being politically incorrect or insensitive. Other extremes of the opinion spectrum either criticized the exhibit for "whitewashing" the manner in which racially sensitive issues were presented or chastised it for mentioning the topics at all. All this, coupled with the obsolescence of the electronics which controlled the show, led us to the conclusion that it was time for a refresh of the exhibit which, for many, will be their first and most lasting impression of the banjo and its impact on American history and popular culture. So, as I write this to the soundtrack of the pounding hammers and whirring saws being used to demolish and discard what was once a source of great pride, I remain grateful for simply still being here and having been given yet another chance to research and retell the story of the banjo's complicated and colorful past, exciting present and unlimited future.



CANDY CANE CHRISTMAS

FROM THE

AMERICAN BANJO MUSEUM

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3RD | 1:00-4:00PM

Pictures with Santa
Live Music Performances
Christmas Treats

Free to Children 15 & Under
\$8 Adult Admission OR
Free with new, unwrapped toy for
The Red Andrews Dinner

9 E. SHERIDAN AVE. OKC | AMERICANBANJOMUSEUM.COM



BANJO GOES HOLLYWOOD



The banjo hit went "Hollywood" in October when Martin Scorsese's *Killers of the Flower Moon* opened in U.S. theaters. Friends of the museum may be surprised to know that filmmaker's latest epic features two banjos provided by the American Banjo Museum. Based on the 2017 nonfiction book by David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, which stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro, is set in Oklahoma during the 1920s and portrays the murders of members of the Osage Nation over oil rights.

In one scene, Lucas Ross, the ABM's promotion and outreach coordinator plays a S.S. Stewart Champion model banjo that was donated to the museum by Don Lewis. Later in the film, ABM executive director, Johnny Baier, is seen playing an early 1920s Paramount Style F plectrum banjo, also from the museum's collection. "The museum prides itself in aiding to help a project be as authentic as possible when it comes to banjos," Ross said. Baier agreed, adding, "One of my pet peeves with most Hollywood portrayals of the banjo is that the instruments seen on the screen don't fit the musical style or time period of the film or scene.

As such, I was ecstatic that *Killers of the Flower Moon* was doing their best to get it right." An unlikely actor, after Baier offered to visit the set to coach the actors about how to play the banjos accurately for the styles of music in the film, he was offered to play an on-screen role himself and help cast other musicians skilled in early jazz music to also be part of the scene. Baier admitted it was difficult to perform with movie stars like DiCaprio and De Niro working right in front of him, but he "managed to follow Mr. Scorsese's simple direction, 'Ignore Bob and Leo and just play.'" "Although we got just a few seconds of screen time in the final cut, being a small part in the telling of such an important story in a masterwork of cinema is truly a highlight of my career," Baier said. "If anyone would have predicted that someday my name would be flashing across the screen in the credits of a Martin Scorsese film, I would have told them they were daffy." Both the S.S. Stewart and Paramount banjos will be part of a future exhibit at the American Banjo Museum which will recount the banjo's most memorable moments in film and television.



JIM HENSON'S 87TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

In September, Lucas Ross-Promotions and Outreach Coordinator, traveled to New York as part of the Jim Henson celebration on what would have been his 87th birthday. Lucas represented the American Banjo Museum as a 'banjo gift' of sorts, serenading the invited Muppet fans who traveled there for a special walking tour of Manhattan and Central Park led by Henson's daughter and friend of the Museum, Heather Henson.

In addition to playing at the Henson Family Carriage House Studio, where several of Jim's later productions were filmed, Lucas was invited by Craig Shemin of the Jim Henson Legacy to perform at Museum of the Moving Image's special presentation of rare clips from the Jimmy Dean Show that featured one of Henson's iconic characters, Rowlf the Dog.

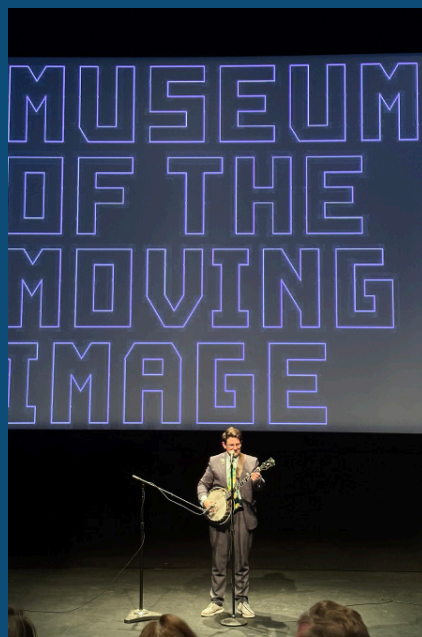
Lucas led the audience in songs that spanned various Muppet productions from, Kermit's "Bein'



Green," "I Don't Want To Live On The Moon," from Sesame Street as well as favorite songs of Jim the Muppet characters covered like, Randy Newman's "Simon Smith and His Dancing Bear." After the 80 minute reel of delightful comedy bits and bloopers from Jimmy Dean and Rowlf, Lucas returned for a special request from organizer, Shemin: Bob Gibson's "I Come For To Play" which was one of the first songs Kermit ever played on banjo from original program locally produced "Sam and Friends" in the 1950s. The show ended with the inevitable "Rainbow Connection," in which

Lucas was joined in song by the entire audience- including Ryan Dillan (Sesame Street's "Elmo") and Stephanie D'Abruzzo (Broadway's Avenue Q) as well as Hamilton's Fergie Philippe.

Ross was also able to connect our friend Karen Faulk, head archivist for The Jim Henson Company. Karen has previously worked with American Banjo Museum on our original 2018 exhibit featuring the Muppet Banjo, Henson's original notes and blueprints along with the frog himself. Here's to hoping our green friend returns to our gallery!



MEMBERSHIP



BECOME A MEMBER TODAY & ENJOY THE FULL RANGE OF EXPERIENCES THE MUSEUM HAS TO OFFER

- Distinctive permanent exhibition galleries that tell the fascinating story and history of the banjo – its performers, traditions, and innovations.
- Dynamic special exhibit galleries that change regularly, bringing new and exciting exhibits that highlight historically significant instruments, artifacts, and the performers who made them famous!
- Regular performances in the “Your Father’s Mustache” performance room and much, much more!

Membership dues are tax deductible and directly assist in supporting the preservation of unique and historically significant banjos and artifacts.

As individuals we may never be fortunate enough to own a banjo or collection of banjos with the significance of a national treasure, but, as members of the American Banjo Museum, you help preserve many of these priceless instruments and share the joy they bring with future generations.

For more information on how to become a Member of the American Banjo Museum, please visit americanbanjomuseum.com/become-a-member or call (405) 604-2793.

MEMBERSHIP

The American Banjo Museum wishes to recognize and thank new members and those that have renewed their membership the third quarter of 2023.

Individual Membership

Howell W. Agnew
Clark Akatiff
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Bill Brisotti
George Byrnes
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Dee Jerome
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To become a member, gift a membership, or upgrade your current membership call 405-604-2793 or visit americanbanjomuseum.com.

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Lifetime Membership

Buck Trent



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