



AMERICAN BANJO MUSEUM QUARTERLY

WINTER 2024

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2024 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

One of our favorite duties during any given year is the honoring of new inductees to the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame. Originally established in Guthrie, Oklahoma in 1998, during the 15 years that followed more than 70 individuals and entities in the four-string banjo world whose career accomplishments might have otherwise gone unrecognized were honored by the Hall of Fame. In its infancy, the American Banjo Museum itself was an extension of the Hall of Fame, bestowing annual honors upon jazz age four-string banjo pioneers as well as the contemporary artists, educators, manufacturers and promoters who carried on the traditions of their predecessors.

However, as time passed and the American Banjo Museum grew to embrace all types of banjos and playing styles, it became clear that the Hall of Fame must evolve as well. As such, in 2013, the ABM Board of Directors voted to establish an annual performance category to honor all styles of five-string banjo playing as well as opening the other previously four-string banjo exclusive non-performance categories to all types of banjos. With this move the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame was established.

With each passing year, the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame grows in acceptance and stature among the worldwide banjo community. The inclusive nature of its mission is seen through its honoring of a diverse body of banjo notables. From iconic names such as Earl Scruggs, Steve Martin, Alison Brown and Belá Fleck to little known – yet equally important – contributors to the art or industry of the banjo, the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame continues to recognize those who have shaped the banjo's colorful past, exciting present and unlimited future. Like past recipients, honorees for 2024 have each displayed a lifelong commitment to the banjo in one of five categories.

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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.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The American Banjo Museum is a world-class 21,000 square foot facility honoring the rich history, vibrant spirit and unlimited future of the banjo. The museum's collection contains more than 400 instruments, recordings, film, video, printed music, instructional materials, ephemera and memorabilia associated with the banjo. The museum contains the largest collection in the world of banjos on public display. Galleries include replicas of primitive banjos developed by African slaves, actual Minstrel Age instruments from mid-19th century, Classic Era banjos from the late 1800s and early 1900s, post WWII instruments used in bluegrass, folk and world music. Much of the museum's core collection is ornately decorated banjos made in America during the Jazz Age of the 1920s and 30s.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As I spend most of my days in my office on the 2nd floor of the museum, I have become very in tune with the sounds created both around my office and on the floor beneath me. I can hear people conversing as they walk up the stairs, the nervous patter of kid's feet as they run around our exhibits, people trying out instruments in the Learning Lounge, and even guests cranking out souvenirs from our penny pressing machine! However, over the years one of my favorite museum sounds took place every other Wednesday afternoon when Jack Murphy volunteered at the front desk.

Even though he had difficulty hearing (or maybe because he had difficulty hearing), Jack always spoke at a volume which was difficult to miss. But, thankfully, what he had to say was always positive and upbeat. Even a floor away I could hear him greeting guests with an enthusiasm and passion which reflected just how much being part of the American Banjo Mu-

seum meant to him. As time passed, Jack's infectious and eternal optimism became a real comfort to me - particularly when "whatever" was happening to challenge my day, week or month!

Looking back, I really didn't (and still don't) know too much about Jack Murphy except that I would have trusted him with my life. I do know he was proudly a career member of the United States Coast Guard who, because of his profession, could go on at length about different cities and areas of our country. Somewhere in his travels (I believe he said it was Peoria) he picked up a cheap tenor banjo and began the process which would ultimately touch just about anybody who was associated with the museum.

My first encounter with Jack Murphy was in the 1990s at one of the early Guthrie Jazz Banjo Festival events. As part of the Okie Dokie Banjo Band, Jack's enthusiasm for the music and people's enjoyment of it were transparent and infectious. As I had traveled from Florida to perform, I still recall Jack making certain that not only were my creature comfort needs taken care of, but that I was made to feel welcomed - like one of the family - as well. Later, when I moved to Oklahoma to become the museum director in Guthrie in 2004, Jack displayed the same welcoming spirit and support.

From that point forward, whenever the museum needed help, Jack Murphy was willing to take on the challenge. When I suggested we form a youth banjo band, Jack spearheaded the project with infinite patience and commitment. As the acquisition of the Dierk Frerichs collection while still in

Guthrie segued into our relocation to Oklahoma City in 2009, Jack and his ever-ready team of Coast Guard volunteers became an invaluable resource. Then, from the day we opened our doors on OKC, Jack spent the next 14 years in support of the important mission for which we shared an equal passion.

A member of the museum's board of directors, Jack was one of the important local individuals who made certain that the museum's business was being properly attended to. Still, it was his joyous attitude each time you would interact with him which made everyone from guests to our staff to his fellow board members feel both pride and gratification in the shared experience which being part of the museum provides to us all.

Although he had many health concerns, I never once heard Jack complain about them. Aware of some of the challenges he was facing, where the strength came from for him to become our own version of the Energizer Bunny, I can't fathom. Even the last time I saw him at his regular post at the front desk, greeting me with his typical boisterous "Hello Mr. Johnny" welcome, there was no hint of the forces that were working against him. As such, when the message came that he had passed away just a couple of weeks later, I was as shocked and affected in a way that has rarely happened in my life.

While I believe Jack would allow and appreciate us mourning his passing (at least for a little while), I am also very certain that he would be equally - if not more - fulfilled to know that we are continuing the work *(continued on next page...)*

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CONTINUED



that was so important to him in the positive spirit in which he brought to everything he did for the American Banjo Museum.

Like the parent who faces the realization that their children have "left the nest" when they experience an awkward silence in a house which was once full of audible joy and laughter, I must now accept that fact that with the passing of Jack Murphy, Wednesday afternoons at the museum will never sound the same again.

CANDY CANE CHRISTMAS REVIEW



Thank you to everyone that attended Candy Cane Christmas on Sunday, December 3, 2023! Audiences enjoyed performances by the Okie Dokie Banjo Band, Lucas Ross, Tyler & Kristin Jackson, and Zac Lee. Banjo fans of all ages were able to create and decorate their own paper banjos and take pictures with Santa himself. Thanks to many wonderful donations, the Banjo Museum was able to donate several boxes of toys to the Red Andrews Dinner. Our museum's building was at one time a candy factory that made and distributed candy canes across the Midwest and southern states. We love carrying on the tradition and celebrating the holidays with you all!



RECENT ACQUISITION

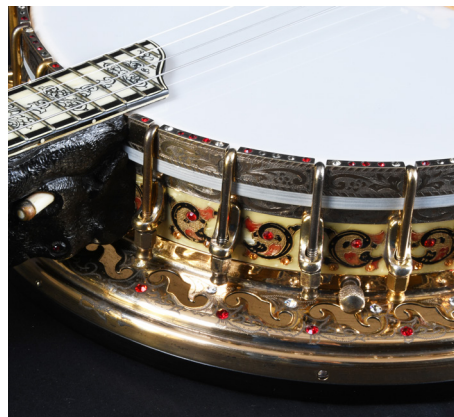
When you work in a place like the American Banjo Museum it is possible to become numb to the fact that you are surrounded by one of the greatest and most diverse collection of banjos in history. When immersed in such a collection - where rarities you once only dreamed existed become part of your everyday life, it can take an awful lot to become excited at the possibility of a new acquisition. However, that was just the sensation I felt when legendary Japanese banjo collector, Akira Tsumura, offered us a stunning example of the greatest work from one of the most revered banjo manufacturers of all time...Let's paint this picture "by the numbers"...

During the heyday of the four-string banjo in the 1920s and early 30s, the Bacon Banjo Company of Groton, Connecticut was widely accepted as the number one manufacturer of banjos. Their professional grade banjos, all marketed as the B&D Silver Bell were offered in six different model lines - the standard Silver Bell, the Montana Silver Bell, the Sultana Silver Bell, the Symphonie Silver Bell and the Ne Plus Ultra Silver Bell. While essentially the same banjos internally, these model lines differed in their decorative themes as well as use of different woods and other decor elements.

To confuse things just a bit more, each of the Silver Bell model lines had the option of levels of additional decoration that increased numerically from the simple #1 to (in the case of the Ne Plus Ultra Line) all the way up to #9. From the entry level B&D Silver Bell #1 priced at \$125.00 (in 1920s dollars), the cost of Silver Bell banjos jumped higher and higher as additional levels of decoration were layered on. The culmination of such unbridled banjo extravagance was the B&D Ne Plus Ultra Silver Bell #9 (even the long-winded name sounds expensive!)

Upon the basic Silver Bell design, Bacon company craftsmen built what has gone on to become a holy grail among collectible banjos. All the metal parts of the #9 were elaborately hand engraved and gold-plated prior to being encrusted with multi-color rhinestones (which Bacon called "brilliants"). The fingerboard of the solid ebony neck was crafted of genuine elephant ivory which was scrimshawed in a "tree of life" pattern. At the heel of the neck, a carving depicting the head of an elephant - complete with ivory tusks capped with solid gold - carried on the theme. The resonator back along with the peghead back and front and body sides were fashioned of the new and exotic celluloid material marketed as "pearloid" which was engraved and hand tinted prior to being inlaid with more "brilliants".

The over-the-top was a visual sensation (but, with it's \$1,250.00 cost, not for the faint of wallet). As such, fewer than 15 examples of the venerated model are known to exist. While the collection of Akira Tsumura once boasted multiple examples of the B&D Ne Plus Ultra Silver Bell #9, as of last year only one remained in his possession. And it was this very special banjo - made in 1930 for Bacon endorser, W. S. Weiser - which Mr. Tsumura brought with him from Tokyo in October of 2023 to become part of the collection of the American Banjo Museum. Now THAT'S exciting!





KRISTIN SCOTT BENSON

FIVE-STRING PERFORMANCE

A five-time International Bluegrass Music Association Banjo Player of the Year and recipient of the 2018 Steve Martin Prize for Excellence in Banjo and Bluegrass, Benson is widely recognized as the first woman to take a place as a sideman in a top-tier Bluegrass band. Since 2008 her association with the Grammy-nominated group, The Grascals, Kristin has exhibited impeccable taste, timing, and tone on stage, in the studio, and as part of national media appearances including The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Fox & Friends, The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson, and CBS' The Talk, among others. The band has also performed for Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, as well as accumulating nearly 200 performances on the Grand Ole Opry.

KEN AOKI

FOUR-STRING PERFORMANCE

From his earliest musical aspirations, Japan's Ken Aoki held a passion for the banjo and its place in American pop culture during the 1920s and 30s. Although (or perhaps because) he was removed from the direct influence of a similar generation of younger American banjoists during the 1980s and 90s, Ken was forced to work on his own, developing both amazing technical skill as well as world-class musicianship on the plectrum and tenor banjos as well as the guitar. With an immense repertoire ranging from difficult Harry Reser solos and other banjo standards to jazz, classics, Broadway and pop, Ken Aoki stands out as an amazing international banjo phenomenon.



DR. RALPH STANLEY

HISTORICAL

Despite little musical influence as a child, legendary bluegrass artist, Ralph Stanley, was internationally known for his unique, innovative style of singing and banjo playing. Born and raised in Virginia, his mother bought his first banjo and began teaching him how to play "clawhammer" style when he was 15. Stanley's musical career didn't kick into full swing until after he returned from a stint in the US Army in 1945 when he joined his guitar-playing older brother, Carter Stanley, and started a band called Clinch Mountain Boys. The duo caught the eye of a Columbia Records executive who signed them on as the Stanley Brothers. The duo continued to perform until 1966 when Ralph's brother passed away. As a soloist, Stanley's career prospered. He was inducted into the International Music Hall of Honor in 1992, and the Grand Ole Opry in 2000, the same year in which his work was featured in the film O Brother, Where Art Thou, for which he won a 2002 Grammy Award for Best Male Country Vocal Performance.





NED LUBERECKI

PROMOTION

A multi-faceted banjo force, Ned Luberecki divides his time between performance, instruction and banjo promotion – all for the betterment of the worldwide banjo community. The 2018 IBMA Banjo Player of the Year, Ned currently performs with Becky Buller and tours as Nedski and Mojo (with Stephen Mouglin of the Sam Bush Band). As an instructor, in addition to offering private lessons - both in person and via the internet, Luberecki is a mainstay at major banjo camps around the world. However, his most widespread impact just may be his weekly hosting of the SiriusXM radio program Bluegrass Junction.

BILL EVANS

INSTRUCTION & EDUCATION

San Francisco based composer, educator, performer and author, Bill Evans holds the distinction of skillfully playing every type of banjo - from its earliest roots in the West African akonting to the modern Bluegrass banjo. Holding a master's degree in music from the University of California at Berkeley, Evans educates and enlightens thousands of people annually with his Banjo In America concert program in which he plays multiple banjos while presenting musical examples from the 17th century, through the minstrel, classic and jazz eras to the banjo's modern day voice in Bluegrass, folk and world music. Additionally, Evans hosts the annual Nashcamp Bluegrass camp which brings top professional performers together with aspiring banjo students.



SAVE THE DATE FOR BANJO FEST 2024!

Kristin Scott Benson, Ken Aoki, Dr. Ralph Stanley (posthumous), Ned Luberecki and Bill Evans will be inducted into the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame during the weekend of **October 10 thru 12, 2024**, as part of the annual BANJO FEST weekend in Oklahoma City. The Hall of Fame inductions will be a highlight of a full weekend of performances, jamming, workshops, and socializing. Full details will be announced in early summer. Until then, please save the dates, plan to be with us in Oklahoma City in October and join us in congratulating this year's American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame honorees!



9 East Sheridan Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73104

MEMBERSHIP

The American Banjo Museum wishes to recognize and thank new members and those that have recently renewed their membership.

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Angel Rogers

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