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The Layrite boys, photo
by Andrea Maurice



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Big City Bluegrass

An in-depth look at the vibrant bluegrass scene in Toronto, ON. Pictured above, The Layrite Boys channel the spirit of '57.



2018 Bands Listing

Our directory of BMAC-affiliated Canadian bluegrass bands. The best resource of the year to find your fellows, and for the venues - to book your gigs!

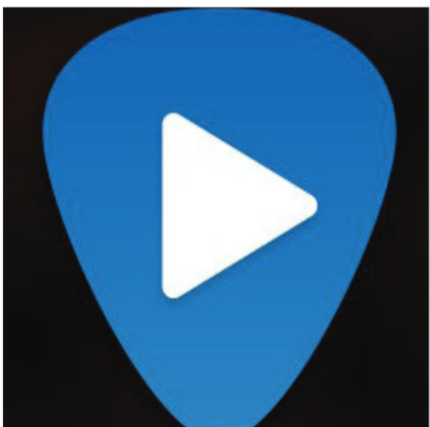
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Kristin Cavoukian with her band Houndstooth.

Also pictured:
Danny Simmons,
Logan McNeil,
and Dave Lang.



West Coast Banjo- picker



A musical autobiography

By Linda Thorburn

When you are asked to write a musical biography of your life where do you begin?

How to explain the intangible things such as the joys of sharing tunes or hearing beautiful lonesome bluegrass music in the distance in the wee hours while off camping?

Better yet, you could expand on what it is like to say you have been blessed having friendships with (and been lucky enough to play bluegrass music with) Dr. Banjo aka Pete Wernick and his wife Joan, Greg Cahill, Jeff Scroggins, Greg Blake, Keith Yoder, Tracey Lynn, Tristan Scroggins, Andrew Collins, Chris Quinn,

Chris Coole, Max Heinemen, John Showman, Darcy Whiteside, Mark Schatz, Valerie Smith, Dave Keenan, Terry Enyeart, Jimmy Allison, Gary Dalrymple, Bill Evans, Alan Munde... and the list just goes on and on.

Yes, the past 38 years have been amazing. Never did I know it would lead where it

did when I announced I wanted to learn to play banjo. But I believe it started much longer ago than that.

My grandparents had a granddaughter clock that, to me, at 3 years old, looked like a grandfather clock. One day, Grandpa taught me all the verses and the chorus to "Grandfather's Clock" by Henry Clay Work, who wrote the song while holidaying in England, where my grandparents were living at the time. They also taught me "Home Sweet Home" shortly after that.

Dad used to walk around the house singing. He was able to just sit down at the piano and play by ear. His mother and two sisters played the fiddle. The one sister was a Toronto Conservatory piano teacher, so music thrived on my Dad's side of the family.

My Mum, on the other hand, couldn't sing a note. My parents enrolled me in the Toronto Conservatory piano lessons, which I endured until the Grade 6 level.

I was never sure why I was listening to the Brothers 4 when my friends chose the Beatles.

When I was in high school, Dad and I would watch Glen Campbell, Don Messer's Jubilee, Tommy Hunter and Barbara Mandrell, and of course the Beverly Hillbillies and Petticoat Junction.

Music at the YMCA, where I was a leader, produced a lunchtime singsong, to which one fellow brought his banjo. It was fascinating to listen to.

About ten years later, I moved to Coombs and attended the very first Coombs Bluegrass Festival in 1978. Here, I heard live bluegrass music played, which I could not get out of my head. I was hooked, and bought an Ibanez frailing banjo on which I attempted to learn Scruggs-style banjo. That lasted a couple of weeks, then was replaced with a resonator banjo, a Washburn B-12, and I began practicing endless roll patterns as a lefty playing righty.

After a series of short lived banjo

teachers, I managed to get lessons from Gerry Patch, who played all bluegrass instruments. Banjo lessons included trips to Vancouver to see such greats as Ralph Stanley and the Clinch Mountain Boys, J D Crowe and the New South, The Bluegrass Cardinals,

Tony Trischka, and many more.

I might also add that we had no computers, so much of the learning material was tabbed and/or recorded on a small mono tape recorder.

In 1984 until 1988, I was a member of Better Times Bluegrass

Band. We played a number of festivals over the years, including the Chetwynd Bluegrass Festival, the Burns Lake Bluegrass Festival, and the Coombs Bluegrass Festival.

From 1992 until 2006, I was the

owner and operator of a bakery. Since then, I have played with the bands GrassMates, Island BlueRose, BackPorch Banjo, and Raisin Cain.

From 2008 - 2015 I ran the Coombs Bluegrass Festival, a non-profit society. It provided lots of exposure to great bands, plus a wonderful opportunity to take in many banjo workshops. In 2010 I started a new bluegrass festival, called Lighthouse Bluegrass Festival, which ran 6 years.

On June 23, 2013, I slipped and broke my wrist. The recovery was long and slow, but progress was made, and today I can still play and provide bluegrass guidance in the area.

Throughout my career, I have instructed Scruggs style playing on the 5 string banjo. My musical friendships span the world. I'm exposed to a lot of bluegrass music, have a great deal to do with musical events in my area.

Was learning to play the banjo the best thing I ever did? Absolutely! I still play "Grandfather's Clock" and "Home Sweet Home". They are my favourites.

"I was never sure why I was listening to the Brothers 4 when my friends chose the Beatles."

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