

## RICH STILLMAN WINS FOX BANJO AUCTION



*Rich Stillman holding the Fox Banjo*

The Bluegrass Music Association of Maine congratulates Rich Stillman, the winning bidder and now proud owner of the FOX Banjo! Rich is a Massachusetts banjo player who is well-known to Maine Bluegrass players; Rich knew Bob French, and traded licks with him '...back in the day'. Thanks to all who participated in the online bidding for our first EVER online auction event.

Special thanks to Grace French for her kind donation of Bob French's banjo, made with Jimmy Cox tone ring and parts, and to the BMAM Board of Directors who put so much work into making this Fundraiser a great success!



## BLUEGRASS SUMMER 2021 - by Stan Keach



*Mama Beth, MC, and Joe Mullins at the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival.*

As Spring 2021 came upon us, we didn't really know what to expect. Was the pandemic winding down? It appeared that it was until the Delta Variant hit us, and breakthrough cases increased. Many festivals were up in the air: would they happen, or would they cancel? It turns out that all the major bluegrass festivals took place, but they certainly felt the impact of the pandemic.

I asked some festivals and bands to "report in" . . . to fill us in on how things went this summer from their various perspectives. The following is what they had to say:

### THOMAS POINT BEACH

*- Shari Elder Reporting -*

After two long years of uncertainty, the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival in Brunswick, Maine presented their annual Labor Day Weekend bluegrass reunion with mostly ideal weather, elated guests, and a talented line-up of musicians overflowing with excitement about playing to an audience once again. When COVID forced the cancellation of the 2020 Festival, Thomas Point Beach made the decision to offer their booked line-up the opportunity to roll their contracts to 2021. Almost all acts chose this option, making for a stellar line-up including Del McCoury, Sam Bush, The Gibson Brothers, and Steep Canyon Rangers among the 25 bands on the roster. Despite the fact that all state guidelines around crowd sizes were lifted in May, the TPB team carefully managed ticket sales as they monitored the trends of the virus; first opening sales in limited blocks, then more widely in June and July with the hopeful anticipation of the effect the vaccine was having on bringing cases down. As the Delta Variant started to become more prevalent later in the summer, the team once again paused sales, and made a decision to hold sales to just below 2019 numbers. Sales were trending to an otherwise large increase, as people's desire to get back to normal and back to live music events fueled all time pre-sales records. For the first time in the festival history, a decision was made to close the gate to day tickets on Saturday to keep the numbers comfortable.

*Continued on page 2.*

**BLUEGRASS SUMMER 2021** *Continued from page 1.***THOMAS POINT BEACH***- Shari Elder Reporting -*

As a fully outdoor event, no mask mandate was in place, but folks were encouraged to be kind and aware and give people space to be comfortable. In the indoor spaces—bathhouses and the Main Lodge (which was fully opened and ventilated), masks were required for non-vaccinated and encouraged for all if they were unable to stay distanced. Other decisions were made for the safety of guests and bands such as a new Band Merchandise Area to give bands an option to distance as needed, more space in the seating area so the audience could spread chairs further apart, more limited numbers at some children's activities and workshops, no family movies held in the Rec Hall, and no scheduled bands at the caboose late night. We did miss our Canadian friends who were unable to cross the border.

Overall, there was an air of celebration and delight in being together again, and a true sense of the family reunion feel that makes this event so special. Missy Raines, summed it up well after playing TPB for the first time this year, "What a beautiful event, it reminded me of the festivals I grew up going to—where the whole campground felt like family."

The fly overs from the Blue Angels added to the excitement!

A few other things came into play this year in festival planning that people probably are not aware of. We all dealt with the same issues that are impacting other industries like supply chain (harder to get items we need – wristbands, t-shirts one fest never got shirts in time for the festival – we had to change our shirt color several times to get enough stock, materials for signage, etc), extended shipping and lead times (ie, programs needed to be to the printer earlier than usual), staffing shortages, travel challenges (bands struggled to find rental cars which meant we had to also provide shuttle services for them), last minute air schedule changes for bands made it hard to nail down schedules for main stage and workshops, etc. Despite all this, the festival was a great success and we are very grateful for all who attended and who jumped in to give a hand! We look forward to 2022 and remain hopeful we will be back to normal, whatever that is now!

**BLISTERED FINGERS BLUEGRASS FESTIVALS***- Greg and Sandy Cormier Reporting -*

We had two great festivals. We lucked out on both the June and August festivals with no state restrictions at the time. We grew 32% in June and 6% in August. This is without our Canadian attendees. We ran a normal festival due to no restrictions. We drew a lot of new and younger folks. Many folks never had been to Maine before and some had never been to a Bluegrass festival. These folks were blown away and said they'd be returning again. We did have masks and sanitizers available for all but there were only a few used. As for field picking, many people commented on how many jam sessions were going on at both festivals and how it was like the good old days.

One thing we have noticed that may have started in 2019 was the size of RV's and campers have gotten smaller. People seem to be downsizing. We had 30-40 pop up campers and a lot more tenters this year at each festival, when in the past there was only a couple. Also at both the June and August festival our large 200 ft. tent was moved back 20 feet from previous years to allow for a larger audience. As far as Covid-19 affecting Bluegrass, promoters and bands have had many unrecoverable expenses that occurred with the total shutdown in 2019. It will take a long time to recover and is causing a loss of many festivals and performers across the country. We can only hope this is all behind us.

Thanks to BMAM for all you do to help keep Bluegrass alive.

*Continued on page 3.***EASTERN JAM POSTPONED  
BECAUSE OF COVID**

Hey Fellow Jammers!

I am sorry to say that due to the recent spike in COVID cases in Penobscot County, The board of directors have decided that the BMAM jams will be postponed until further notice. We will be monitoring the situation and will respond accordingly. BMAM will plan to hold virtual jams and will announce the schedule. Once again I am sorry for the bad news but this is the reality of the times we are in.

**Thanks, Dale Canning  
BMAM**

**ORIGINAL SCHEDULE  
OF EASTERN JAM**

**PLEASE NOTE:** the Eastern Jam has been postponed because of the recent spike in COVID cases, especially in Penobscot County. We will try to update members and jammers as soon as we can with changes in plans.

**BMAM EASTERN JAM  
SCHEDULE 2021-2022**

- When they resume, Jams are at the Old Town River Side Grange located 1266 N. Main St in Brewer, Maine (on the Brewer-Eddington town line)
- Sunday afternoons. Jams will be held from 12:30 to 5:00 PM.
- \$5.00 for BMAM members and \$7.00 for non-members
- There will be refreshments available for purchase.
- The Jam is open to non-electric, non-amplified, acoustic instruments.
- ALL levels of play welcome!
- Listeners welcome!

**ORIGINAL SCHEDULE OF EASTERN JAM**

- ♣ October 3rd, 2021
- ♣ November 7th, 2021
- ♣ December 5th, 2021
- ♣ January 2nd, 2022
- ♣ February 6th, 2022
- ♣ March 6th, 2022
- ♣ April 3rd, 2022
- ♣ May 1st, 2022

**BLUEGRASS  
JAMS!**  
**BMAM BLUEGRASS  
MUSIC JAMS ARE  
EXPECTED TO RESUME**

Check the BMAM website or Facebook page for details as they develop!

[www.mainebluegrass.org](http://www.mainebluegrass.org)





## BMAM ANNUAL MEETING

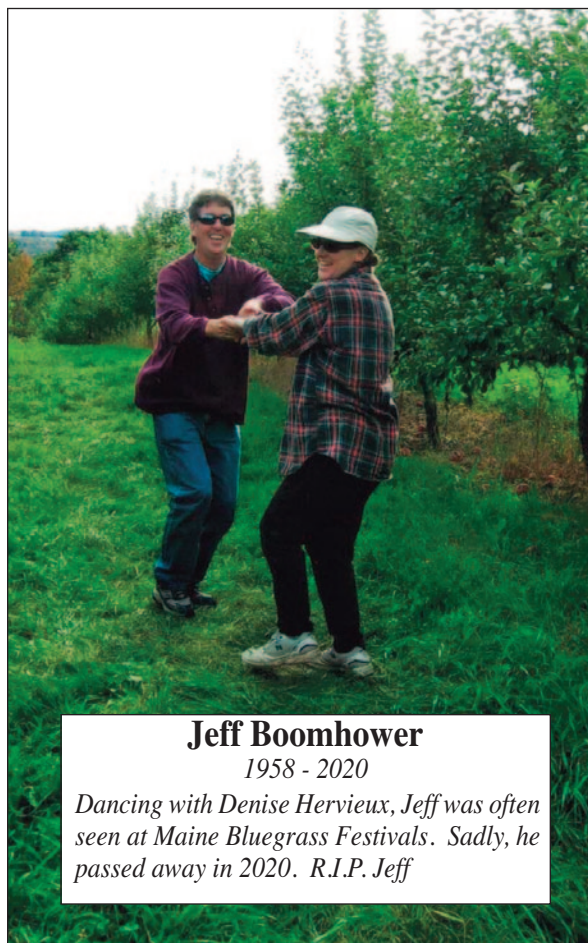
The Bluegrass Music Association of Maine's Annual Meeting will be held virtually this year on the Zoom platform, October 20, 2021 at 6:00 P.M.

We understand that not everyone has computer access but decided that given the pandemic, at least we could offer our members with access the opportunity to safely attend the Annual Meeting via Zoom.

Note that a full reporting of the Annual Meeting and the announcement of the newly elected President and Board Members and results of the Bylaw Amendment vote will be in the Winter Newsletter, posted on BMAM's website, and facebook page.

If you want to attend the Zoom Annual Meeting, please contact Nellie Kennedy, Secretary, to request the logon information and link. Please send an email to [bmam.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:bmam.secretary@gmail.com) at least 48 hours before the meeting to ensure that you receive the link on time.

All members are always welcome to attend any of our Board meetings as a guest. Please email Acting Chairperson, Dean Henderson at [dhenderson@mainebluegrass.org](mailto:dhenderson@mainebluegrass.org) or Nellie Kennedy [bmam.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:bmam.secretary@gmail.com) phone 207-277-3733, or contact any BMAM officer / board members (contact info is in this newsletter). We value your input.



**Jeff Boomhower**

1958 - 2020

*Dancing with Denise Hervieux, Jeff was often seen at Maine Bluegrass Festivals. Sadly, he passed away in 2020. R.I.P. Jeff*

## BLUEGRASS SUMMER 2021 *Continued from page 2.*

### ERICA SHIPMAN

Thanks for reaching out. We did our last live stream concert Memorial Day weekend and have been playing live, in person performances ever since. We have been very fortunate in that we haven't had to deal with any gig cancellations with Erica Brown & The Bluegrass Connection this summer. Dariln' Corey has had 2 cancellations for gigs scheduled in Maine. A summer concert series got cancelled because of lack of funding for the series due to Covid and we had a festival performance cancelled for this month (September) because of the uptick in Covid cases in that area.

We have been playing mostly outdoor shows with the exception of a few indoor shows. The indoor shows have been handled very responsibly and given that we are all fully vaccinated we felt safe doing them. I think it's important to note that a lot of venues are beginning to put Covid policies in place, requiring masks and proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test within so many hours of attending a concert. Because we aren't in the habit of having our vaccination cards on us I've seen many people turned away at the door. I would encourage everyone to take a photo of their vaccination card with their cell phones so they will have it on them at all times. I would also encourage people to check with the venue before arriving to see what their policies are as they may all differ a bit depending on the location and size of the venue.

### BACK WOODS ROAD

It has been a year from hell as you know for all bands, no practice, no band socializing for so long. Jane and I actually stopped playing our instruments for a few months until we realized how much we missed it. Too much negative news, social media etc, we shut it off and started going over our music. Our first gig was at the Village Tavern on Belgrade lake; we were outside and it was packed. I had problems with our PA because I made mistakes putting it all together, ha ha; it had been so long I forgot what I was doing. Jane and I were fortunate as we got no reaction to the vaccine. Getting to play for the first time in over a year was so exciting. We played the Brunswick Arts Festival, Blistered Fingers, and The Thomas Point Bluegrass Festival to some of the best crowds in the history of the band. We still have a few more gigs lined up, a surveyors convention at Sunday River and another one at Apple Crest Orchards in Exeter N.H.

### TED DEMILLE

It was a successful yet measured playing schedule this year. Both my bands had landmark gigs, Magic 8 Ball playing Ossipee Valley Music Festival, and Old Eleven playing Thomas Point Beach. I also managed the music at the Yarmouth Farmers' Market and we hosted weekly performers. There were no cancellations, but bookings were still just occasional. I have played all year on Zoom open mics workshopping new material. Rick Lang and I further developed our songwriting partnership, writing four or five new songs. It was all ok as there was so much to do this summer and the light playing schedule opened up more time for reconnecting with friends and family.

### SANDY RIVER RAMBLERS

We were thrilled to start doing concerts again after a 14-month hiatus due to the pandemic. We had mostly outdoor concerts this summer, but had one scheduled theater concert, and were forced indoors by weather at two concerts originally scheduled for outdoors. We also pre-recorded one virtual Facebook concert to be aired soon. We had two concerts canceled due to the Delta Variant and to the increase of breakthrough cases. As the indoor concert season approaches, we have no concerts lined up for the fall, which is very unusual for us.

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## BLUEGRASS SUMMER 2021

*Continued from page 3.*

### STAN KEACH, SONGWRITER

This is the year that I've been planning to begin pitching songs in earnest again to well-known bluegrass bands, after a long, long spell of limited pitching due to burnout and other commitments. My primary co-writer, Jeff Trippe, and I spent the winter putting together a collection of carefully-produced demos, and we started sending them out in May, only to find out that most big-time bands had recorded during the height of the pandemic since, with live performances so limited, there was little else that bands could do. That's okay. With the festival up and running again, we were able to connect with quite a few bands and we're looking forward to pitching this fall. In fact, we were planning to attend the IBMA World of Bluegrass, but the Delta Variant and breakthrough cases has seriously affected the IBMA event, and we decided for that reason, and because of the risk of traveling, to attend the World of Bluegrass virtually only.

### BMAM

*- Bob Bergesch Reporting -*

It was a very successful summer for the BMAM Festival Booth, with record merchandise sales, and our membership is significantly up, due partly to a busy Festival Booth, and partly to the Play it Forward campaign.

It was a very successful summer for the BMAM Festival Booth, with representation at four Maine festivals over the course of Summer 2021. We had mostly great weather, and lost only a few hours of selling time due to rain or wind.

We introduced a new t-shirt design by Stan Keach, which was available in two colors: a dark, sophisticated "Antique Cherry Red", and "Forest Green". These new shirts helped us achieve record merchandise sales. Over the summer, new and renewal membership activity at Maine Festivals, plus our new "Play It Forward" Program, have helped to restore our membership rolls to pre-COVID levels.

The Maine Bluegrass festivals of Summer 2021 were all special events: everyone, whether performers, customers, campers, vendors or festival staff, seemed genuinely happy to be at the festivals. Queues for food or other services were easy and respectful, with social distancing generally evident.

The BMAM Board of Directors would like to thank all of our Members who volunteered to help at our festival booth in the Summer of 2021.

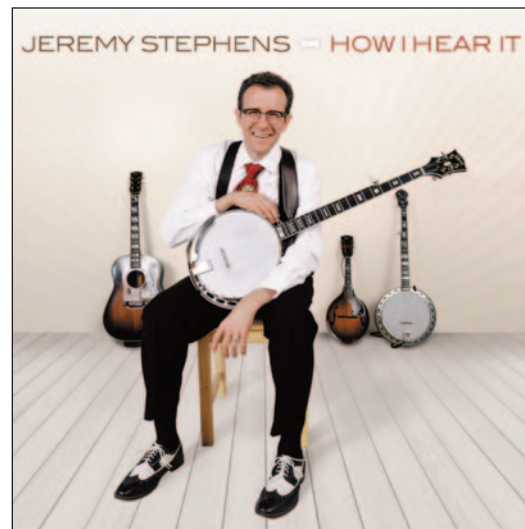


*The BMAM Booth at the Blistered Fingers Festival*

## JEREMY STEPHENS

### How I Hear It Rebel CD 1877

*- Reviewed by Dick Bowden*



I'm reviewing this brand new CD featuring wizard banjoist Jeremy Stephens because of his command of, and love for, Don Reno style banjo picking, which reminds me so much of Jimmy Cox back in the 1960s.

Jeremy is the front man of the award winning new band High Fidelity. I find them the most exciting act to hit the bluegrass circuit since the Johnson Mountain Boys. They are solidly traditional, exciting to watch, and carry the torch of Reno style banjo in the 21st century.

Jeremy is a serious young musician. He's a sincere and engaging emcee, and a wonderful lead and harmony singer. In the High Fidelity show he alternates between old Gibson flat top guitars and vintage Gibson RB 250 "bowtie" banjos. He and his fiddling/singing wife Corinna Rose Logston both have an intense approach to performing at the microphone. Jeremy wears throwback 3-piece suits, old hand-painted wide ties, suspenders, and black and white wingtip shoes on stage. His band mates dress for the stage, if not quite as determinedly old-fashioned as he. Although his demeanor on stage is happy, he is deadly serious (and accurate) about the beauty and value of older forms of country, gospel and bluegrass music.

On this CD Jeremy is joined on some numbers by his wife Corinna Rose (and she is GREAT). The other musicians are top-drawer bluegrass stars including Mike Bub and Brad Benge on bass fiddle, Hunter Berry (from Rhonda Vincent and the Rage) on fiddle, David Grier on rhythm guitar, Don Reno's oldest son Ronnie on mandolin and harmony, and Ricky Skaggs' newly retired tenor singer Paul Brewster. A special surprise is Jeremy's jam buddy Danny Davis who does a deadly Red Allen singing job on one cut.

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## BMAM PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Maine bluegrass festival season has snapped back in a wonderful way! After the long pause of no live music, the summer has brought many great performances, shows and festivals starting with Blistered Fingers in June & August right through Labor Day where the bluegrass festival season in Maine wound up in full strength with Thomas Point Beach. Hopefully you got a chance to catch lots of shows at restaurants, bars and various venues inside and out that have featured many of our favorite bands.

The BMAM Booth made the scene at Blistered Fingers, Thomas Point Beach bluegrass festivals and the Ossipee Valley Music Festival this season. THANK YOU to the promoters who have enthusiastically hosted our booth! We talked a lot of bluegrass with new and old friends, many who signed up or renewed their memberships. And lots of you are sporting our new T Shirts designed by our own Board Member/Newsletter Editor Stan Keach! Some folks have even participated in our "Play it Forward" campaign by buying a membership for a non-member! You can read more about how to "Play it Forward" by going to our website, [mainebluegrass.org](http://mainebluegrass.org), and clicking on the "Play it Forward" picture on the home page.

Our first online BMAM Fundraising Auction was a big success. Rich Stillman, well known banjo player from Massachusetts, was the high bidder and recipient of the Fox Banjo made by BMAM Pioneer Bob French. Thanks to BMAM Pioneer Grace French for generously donating the banjo to our organization. The hard work of board members resulted in the success of this fundraiser, notably Bob Bergesch who was responsible for the banjo set up, and Shari Elder, who administered the online part of the auction.

Thanks to Greg and Sandy Cormier for hosting the BMAM led Blistered Fingers Kids Academy! Dale Canning and I were excited to work with lots of enthusiastic youngsters. Teaching them bluegrass songs and being part of their great performance on stage was heartwarming!

Our BMAM jams in Brewer have been postponed, as noted elsewhere in this newsletter. Thank you to Dale Canning for becoming the new Eastern Jam coordinator. Special thanks to Joan Richert for her many years of running this great jam!

The BMAM Southern Jam normally held at the North Yarmouth Academy in Yarmouth is currently on hiatus due to Covid 19 precautions. If any member knows of a temporary home for a jam, please contact any BMAM Officer or Board Member.

Many of you participated in our ONLINE Play Along sessions last season. We hope to revive these Play Along sessions and the BMAM Online Presence Committee is currently setting in motion new happenings for the members, including workshops as well as other offerings. We will announce these upcoming events in the newsletter, on our BMAM webpage, and on Facebook.

The yearly BMAM election is underway! Please return your ballots, electing a BMAM President and filling 5 Board of Directors positions. This year proposed BMAM bylaw changes will also be voted on. These changes bring the bylaws up to date with our practices, particularly revising procedures reflecting new online methods of operation.

Looking forward to seeing you online and in person at upcoming BMAM jams and events!

**Yours in Bluegrass, Mama Beth Revels**



*Mike Mulligan shows the Pati Crooker's Maine Country Music Hall of Fame Award to the Thomas Beach audience with Joe Kennedy looking on.*



*The LeClaire's (Phil and Ellen) at their induction in the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame, with HOF President, Ken Brooks.*



*Greg and Sandy Cormier hold their Maine Country Music Hall of Fame award at their Blistered Fingers Bluegrass Festival*

## JIMMY COX AS REMEMBERED BY DEV DEVEREUX

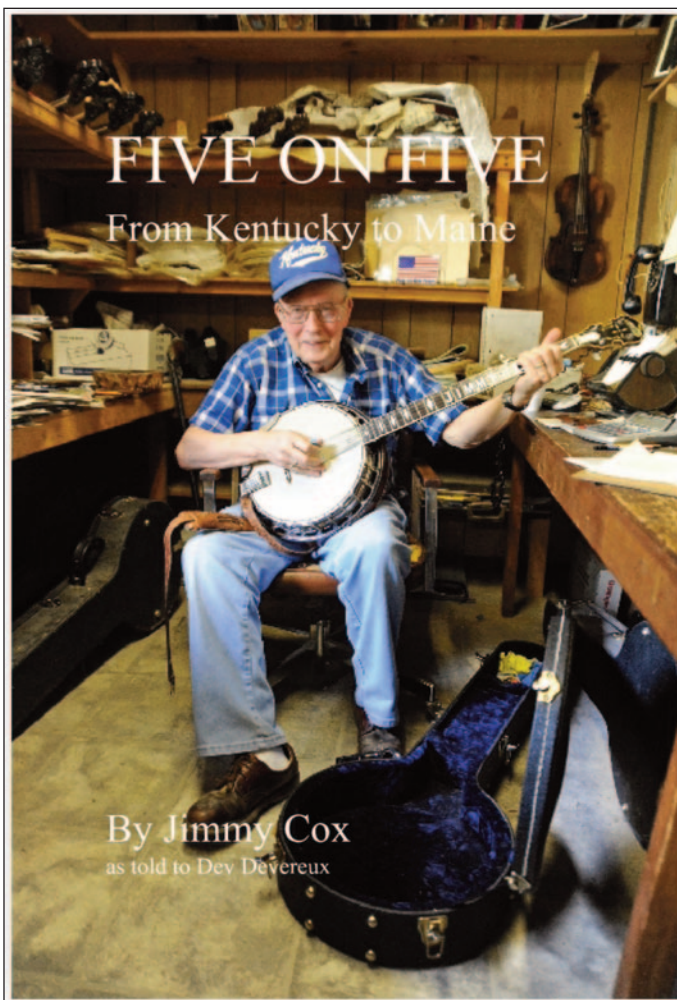
*(Editor's note — In the Spring Issue of the Bluegrass Express, we published several remembrances of Maine Bluegrass legend, Jimmy Cox, who passed away this past winter. This summer I received the following remembrance from Dev Devereux, who "wrote the book" on Jimmy; it was too good to pass up, so here it is.)*

It's a privilege to write a bit about Jimmy Cox, a man whose life was pretty much centered on bluegrass. I'm a seasonal resident in Maine, a life-long bluegrass enthusiast and banjo addict. In 2006 I learned about Jim from a picker at a party, checked out his website and gave him a call. He said "come on over" and several hours later I was smitten by his stories and engaging charm.

Since then, I visited him several times a year and would have done so more often were I a year round resident. Jim was a generous, hard-working, self-effacing, dedicated, professional, precision-minded, caring and kind person — the salt of the earth. He was always willing to share a good story, play a few tunes on his banjo, or teach me a lick or two. On one of my visits he mentioned that his guitar player from the Blue Mountain Boys, Charlie Gilliam, had passed away. In thinking of his own mortality he said that he wished he could write an autobiography. I volunteered to help him, and in his characteristic good humor, he said "Okay, as long as you don't use any of those big words." After many visits to record interviews, listen to his stories and watch him craft banjos, we published *Five on Five: from Kentucky to Maine* on Blurb. I recommend it if you would like to learn more about him.

I came to know of Jim in his later years, and so it's hard for me to fully appreciate his contribution to bluegrass music in Maine. I have to rely on his words and of those who knew him — and also the fact that he was born and raised in southeastern Kentucky, a part of the country that was the epicenter of bluegrass during its formative years. That meant he was the real deal, and as far as I know, the first true southern bluegrass musician to find his way into Maine.

Jim's father was a coal miner, and life was not easy growing up on a hardscrabble farm with nine siblings during the 30s and 40s. Jim's way out was in the Air Force. He ended up at the Presque Isle Air Force Base where he used his mechanical skills to repair jet engines. He married a lovely woman from Fort Kent, Yvette LeBlanc, and settled in Maine to carve out a life of husband, father, bread-winner, musician, luthier, teacher and promoter of bluegrass. After his discharge from the Air Force in the mid-50s, he worked in Presque Isle for F.W. Woolworth.



He eventually ended up in living in Topsham while he worked for the Maine First National Bank across the river in Brunswick until his banjo-making business was successful enough for him to leave the bank.

Music was in his blood from an early age. He read shape notes in the hymnal while playing the organ in church in Wolf Creek, Kentucky. His father taught him to play clawhammer banjo and a bit of guitar. On Sunday afternoons he'd often listen to his father sing and play his banjo with neighboring friends on the porch. Jim also traveled with his dad to hear visiting musicians, including Earl Scruggs, who was playing in a nearby school. Often he would walk into town on Saturdays to hear and play live music which was broadcast on radio from the local furniture store.

Once away from home, it seems that Jim was always involved with a band playing banjo, guitar or mandolin, even when he was in the Air Force. Soon after he had moved to the Brunswick area, he and guitarist, Charlie Gilliam, founded a band called The Blue Mountain Boys. The group offered a blend of country and bluegrass music and included musicians Bob Murray, Jerry Dunning and Smokey Val. The Blue Mountain Boys were a feature of the Ken McKenzie TV show on channel 13 out of Portland during the 60s and into the early 70s. They also had their own live show for a couple of years on Channel 2 in Bangor. After Charlie Gilliam decided to focus solely on country music, Jimmy formed another band, Maine Grass, with Bob Carter, Smokey Val, Dick Gilmore and one of Jimmy's students, a teenaged mandolin player, Bobby St. Pierre, who went on to play with Northstar. Jim's son, Buff, also played with the group when he had time.

As many know, Jim also was a teacher. At one point he mentored as many as 20 students a week in his 5-String Music Studio. He taught them banjo, guitar, mandolin and even a bit of fiddle. An incomplete list of his musical "progeny" includes: Bobby St. Pierre (North Star), Jeff Folger (Katahdin Valley Boys), Kevin Chaffee, Greg and Sandy Cormier, Dale Hodgdon, Gail Hodgdon Craft, Eben Greenleaf and Kevin Johanna.

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## JIMMY COX AS REMEMBERED

*Continued from page 6.*

Jim also was instrumental in promoting Maine's first bluegrass festival. The idea began in 1971 with what he called "picking parties" on the campus of Bowdoin College. Several local groups gathered there for jams - the Prindles, Fred Pike's Band, Sam Tidwell and of course Jim's band. That led to his organizing Maine's first bluegrass festival which was held at the Meadowbrook Campground in Bath on July 23, 1972. Next summer will mark the 50th anniversary. Jim promoted two more festivals and then let others take over so he could focus on his business of making instruments. I imagine his efforts paved the way for the renowned Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival founded by Pati Crooker in 1979.

Jim's main business was making instruments and parts for instruments. He told me that over his lifetime he made eight different lines of banjos, 24 mandolins, six guitars, three fiddles and three resonophonic guitars. As a luthier Jimmy was a self-taught and truly professional craftsman. He attributed his abilities to having learned how to repair things when he was growing up on the farm in southeastern Kentucky. No doubt his training as a mechanic in the Air Force helped, too. I consider him a genius at what he did.

When he was living in Topsham and playing out, he decided that he didn't like the sound of his banjo and set out to build one from scratch. Only someone as gifted as Jim could do this. He used an old Gibson as a go-by, his kitchen table as his work bench, and the trees in his back yard to bend the wood for the rim and resonator. He shaped the neck and carved the inlay for it. He even painted a geometric pattern on its resonator with lacquer paint. That would be his first Kentucky-5, and the beginning of the line of Cox banjos.

An apartment kitchen 50 years in the past is quite a contrast to what I saw when my wife and I went to visit him that first time in 2006. After some get-to-know-you chat over a cup of coffee, he showed us his workshop filled with machinery - lathes, band saw, planer, drill, pantograph machine, presses to form resonator backs - and wood, wood shavings, unfinished rims and resonators, an assembled banjo on a work table.....and a steam box waiting for wood to be softened and bent into rims. Then there was a trip to his basement where he kept completed banjos and necks, pots and tone rings ready to be assembled — not to mention the old workshop with a dust-covered back of an incomplete mandolin sitting in a jig.

Jim was proud of his work - and of our country. That is why he repeatedly emphasized that not only were his banjos purely American, but ALL the parts, wood and metal, were made by him except the heads, tuners, tone rings and flanges, which he had cast and plated locally.

I suspect that he was the only banjoist/luthier in the country who made as many different parts for a banjo as he did. And when his grandsons, Jeremy and Adam, were old enough, they helped out.

Jimmy also sold parts - mainly resonators, rims and completed pots. He often collaborated with Frank Neat who made the necks for banjos marketed by the likes of Raymond Fairchild, Ralph Stanley, and Sonny Osborn while Jim provided the pots. The staple of his business was making rims and resonators which have been distributed not only in the US but around the world in places such as England, Ireland and Australia. I was very pleased to learn that his grandson, Adam, will continue in his grandfather's footsteps.

One last bit about Jim, the luthier: he was creative and inventive. For example, in the 60s before bluegrass took hold, people asked his bands to play country music and not bluegrass. "They loved that twangy sound of the pedal steel," Jim said. His response was to design and build a "pedal steel" banjo using an old Paramount 5-string. He followed up that effort with a "button" banjo — a clever feat of engineering with push-buttons on the head that stretched the strings — like a couple of whammy bars or Scruggs/Keith tuners. Always the tinkerer, Jim also made a 6-string banjo with two drone strings - the 5th tuned to the traditional G and the 6th above it tuned to B - an interesting sound but not easy to play.

The last time I saw him was in the fall before the pandemic struck. I have a clear vision of walking into his shop where he was bending over a whirring lathe while trimming a resonator and standing ankle-deep in wood shavings. He turned off the machine and greeted me with a warm handshake and smile. We retreated into his office, where he showed me the inlay designs for his next project — a banjo model called the Black Diamond, a paean to the coal mining region from whence he came — and maybe even a nod to Don Stover's tune, Black Diamond. He wanted it to be painted or stained black. I hope someone someday will finish it for him.

Jimmy didn't advertise much. He was reticent to talk about himself. He simply went about his business and let what he did do the talking. He brought the bluegrass seed to Maine and it spread from there with the help of others.

I truly miss my visits with him, and his wonderfully knowing, proud and smiling chuckle at the end of a tune or lick he showed me.

— *Dev Devereux*

## JEREMY STEPHENS

### How I Hear It Rebel CD 1877

*Continued from page 4.*

And the banjo playing! WHEW!!!! I can remember when I was a teenager in the 1960s how Jimmy Cox was working to incorporate all the “latest” new Don Reno licks into his playing. A lot of folks forget how Reno’s flaming creativity continued long after his partnership with Red Smiley broke up. Playing with Bill Harrell, and later with the three Reno boys Ronnie, Don Wayne and Dale, Don was still POURING ON the hot licks in instrumentals and even in between lines of singing. His joyous overflow of coruscating arpeggios could become almost exhausting to listen to; it was astounding how he could do SO MUCH, SO OFTEN, and SO FAST! Jimmy Cox was absorbing all of this. Fifty years later Jeremy Stephens has absorbed it too, and he deals it out in spades on this CD (and in person on stage too – it’s breathtaking to witness).

The CD opens with a rare Reno instrumental “Sockeye”. Next is a song written by Jeremy’s musical mentor back home in Virginia, “Could I Knock on Your Door” in duet with his wife Corinna Rose. Here Jeremy plays his banjo in open B flat, with no capo. That’s a Reno thing too! Jeremy and Ronnie Reno duet on “Since Wedding Bells Have Rung”, a Don Reno authored weeper. On this cut Jeremy was able to use both Don Reno’s guitar AND his famous banjo Nellie! “Lady Hamilton” is an intricate instrumental, a traditional fiddle tune from the British Isles – it sounds like nothing but bluegrass here! “You’ll Be Lonesome Too” is a fine old Grandpa Jones composition. Jim & Jesse’s “Virginia Waltz” is done here much slower and softer than the Johnson Mountain Boys’ version. “I’ll Be Happy in My Home” is a terrific uptempo bluegrass gospel number (and not the Stanley Brothers song). “The Bells of St Mary’s” is a tip of the hat to an old Don Reno instrumental record. I saw Jimmy Cox play this many times. “Yes Sir That’s My Baby” gets the full Don Reno banjo treatment. “Beautiful Blue Eyes” is a salute to the 1960s Red Allen record and terrific traditional bluegrass at its sharpest. The CD finishes with the old banjo standard that we all tried to learn in the beginning -- “The Old Spinning Wheel”.

The musicians sparkle. Corinna Rose is her usual fierce fiddling self. Hunter Berry was specifically brought in to “channel” Benny Martin’s fiddling. But Jeremy scintillates every time he lays hands on banjo, guitar, a bit of mandolin and even the old autoharp.

I’m sure Jimmy Cox would give his big signature grin if he could hear this record. He would be IMPRESSED at Jeremy Stephens’ banjo mastery.

Buy this CD or download. Be SURE to see High Fidelity led by Jeremy Stephens at a live show (I first encountered them, and was STUNNED, at the Joe Val Festival in Framingham MA a few years ago).

I hope you got to see them at this year’s Thomas Point Beach where the management team honored my recommendation to book High Fidelity. Jeremy Stephens and his cohort will keep traditional bluegrass flourishing.

*Dick Bowden*

## CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

- September 2021

*Dean Henderson*

Hello, everyone. What a summer! It was so good to see old friends and meet new friends after a year without festivals and without our monthly jams last winter.

The Bluegrass Association of Maine was present at four festivals this summer: the Blistered Fingers Bluegrass Festivals in June and August; the Ossipee Valley Music Festival Micro-fest 2021; and the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival. We had some great volunteers representing the BMAM at our booth and we welcomed lots of new and “renewing” members. The board of directors pitched in, too. Our t-Shirts were a big hit. Thank you Everyone!

The Play-It-Forward Membership Program is up and running now. Many of the recipients of memberships have “played it forward,” sponsoring their own memberships.

BMAM held a raffle this summer for Bob French’s “Fox Banjo.” This banjo was built by Bob French, using many Jimmy Cox parts. We would like to, again, thank Grace French for this generous donation. The new owner of the Fox banjo is Rich Stillman. Thank you Rich.

The Board of Directors has had to make a very difficult decision. We were planning to begin holding our monthly Eastern Jam in October. Due to a recent spike in COVID cases, the Board has decided to postpone BMAM jams until further notice. We will be monitoring the situation and will respond accordingly. We are planning more Play-Alongs via Zoom as soon as we can set them up, and we have some other ideas for winter-time workshops that are in the planning stages.

You will soon be receiving your ballots for our Annual Election. This year, in addition to electing members of the board of directors, you will be voting on some changes to our by-laws.

We will continue to watch for guidance so that we can offer opportunities to safely share and enjoy our music.



*IBMA is the non-profit music association that connects, educates, and empowers bluegrass professionals and enthusiasts, honoring tradition and encouraging innovation in the bluegrass community worldwide.*

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**The Bluegrass Music Association of Maine is ...**

an organization of people, listeners and players, who enjoy Bluegrass music. It was formed in March of 1995, and incorporated on July 8, 1996 as a Maine 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. The BMAM, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, welcomes all Bluegrass friends, fans, and pickers to become active members.

Functions of the organization include the following:

- To educate the public about Bluegrass music, in order to foster an appreciation of its history and cultural heritage
- To further the enjoyment of Bluegrass music, for ourselves and others, through teaching, sharing, and playing;
- To encourage participation in Bluegrass music events;
- To promote Bluegrass music as family entertainment;
- To support area workshops, festivals and concerts;
- To support area musicians and bands that play Bluegrass music;
- To inform members about Bluegrass and related events around the state;
- To cooperate with other organizations to promote Bluegrass and related music;
- To preserve the memories of those who have preceded us in this field of endeavor.

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