



**Bluegrass Music
Association
of Maine**

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Winter 2025

A GUIDE TO LIVE BLUEGRASS IN MAINE

By Taylor Smith

From historic barns to intimate theaters, Maine has cultivated a remarkable network of venues that welcome bluegrass musicians and fans alike. Whether you're drawn to the rapid-fire picking of a traditional string band or the more progressive sounds of newgrass groups, the Pine Tree State offers listening rooms that honor the music's roots while embracing its evolution.



The venues featured here represent some of the most beloved destinations for bluegrass in Maine, each offering its own unique atmosphere. From Portland's urban energy to the coastal charm of Boothbay Harbor and the rural beauty of western Maine, these spaces have built strong relationships with the bluegrass community over many years.

Of course, this is just a sampling of some of the amazing rooms to catch a bluegrass show in Maine. Maine's bluegrass scene extends well beyond these pages. Make sure to check out additional venues such as 317 Main Community Music Center in Yarmouth, the Wayside Grange and Theater in Dexter, the Center Theatre in Dover-Foxcroft, and Portland House of Music. And don't skip the breweries, bars, clubs and honkytonks all over the state that welcome bluegrass bands on a regular basis. Each contributes to the rich tapestry of live music that makes Maine such a special place for bluegrass fans.

Grab your friends, mark your calendars, and get ready to experience the magic of live bluegrass in some of the finest listening rooms the state has to offer.

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CELEBRATING BMAM'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY



Pictured above: The inaugural BMAM Steering Committee. Front row, from l.-r.: Greg Cormier, Sandy Cormier, Candi Sawyer, Irene Howe, Joe Kennedy, Beth Revels, Dean Parker, Colleen Hoyt. Back row, from l.-r.: Al Doane, Nancy Record, Sidney Record, Seth Sawyer, Bill Umbel, Al Hawkes, Dale Kyllonen, Bob Wade II, Jason Eckhardt, Robin Parker. Not pictured: Tom Merrill, Bob Boothby, Cindy Kyllonen, Jerry Chase, Jim Williams, Bill Anketell.

In 1995, a group of Maine bluegrass devotees gathered to discuss a new project: forming a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion, preservation and growth of bluegrass in Maine. Those early discussions planted the seeds that grew into the Bluegrass Music Association of Maine, which officially launched in July 1996.

2026 marks BMAM's 30th anniversary, and we're excited to celebrate this milestone with our members and the entire Maine bluegrass community. We've got big plans for 2026, so keep an eye out for updates on our website, www.mainebluegrass.org, on social media and in future issues of the Bluegrass Express. Also, we'd love to hear your stories about BMAM and bluegrass in Maine! Please reach out to memories@mainebluegrass.org and we'll make sure to share your stories with our community.

Throughout our 30-year history, BMAM has relied on many people who have volunteered their time and energy and board members and officers to keep bluegrass thriving in Maine. We also are grateful for the continued support of our members, including those who come to our monthly jams, volunteer at our festival booths, or simply sign up and renew as members. We're proud that BMAM can help support this wonderful community and this music that we all love, and we look forward to many more years of celebrating bluegrass in Maine.

AN IBMA ADVENTURE IN CHATTANOOGA A BEHIND-THE-SCENES RECAP OF A WHIRLWIND WEEK AT IBMA'S WORLD OF BLUEGRASS 2025

By Shari Elder



An all-star jam at IBMA's World of Bluegrass 2025

The International Bluegrass Music Association began hosting the World of Bluegrass (WOB) event in 1987 in Owensboro, Kentucky. The first event combined a trade show with fanfest concerts and has since expanded to a business conference, an exhibit hall, an awards show, the Showcase Ramble, and the Bluegrass Live! festival. The goal is to foster growth and innovation in bluegrass music, and my experience has proven this to be true.

My first IBMA WOB was in 1993 with Pati Crooker from the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival. I consider myself lucky to have attended World of Bluegrass in each of the five host cities. After Owensboro, the event moved to Louisville in 1997, and then to Nashville from 2005 to 2012, and Raleigh, NC, in 2013, where it remained for over a decade before its move this year to Chattanooga, TN. Each venue had a unique feel and flavor. For me, nothing will ever beat the intimacy and authenticity of Owensboro, but I have enjoyed them all.

I have vivid memories of pulling into the Executive Inn Riverside with Pati in the driver's seat after the 18-hour drive, not including breaks for sleep. It was often longer if we veered off course to see Niagara Falls (no, it is not on the way) or got lost in a corn field in Indiana (yup, that happened!). Having our van gave us the flexibility to make side trips to Rosine to visit Bill Monroe's birthplace, or even to decide a few hours after heading north that we wanted to detour back to Nashville for a few extra days! I will forever cherish those precious memories.

I could share many stories of those early days, but I am here to tell you about the most recent World of Bluegrass held this past September.

My experience this year was different from those in years past, as I had the honor of being involved as a co-producer of the 36th Annual IBMA Bluegrass Music Awards Show. As a result, much of my time was spent at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium, the venue for this year's event. I reached out to other Mainers who made the trip to share some of their favorite moments and tips for anyone considering attending in the future.

Whether you are a musician, an association leader, an event producer, a songwriter, an agent, a broadcaster, a writer, a luthier, or giant fan, there is something for everyone at the World of Bluegrass week. I highly encourage anyone with a passion for bluegrass music to give it a try. There are many opportunities for volunteering to help with costs and volunteering can be a great way to experience the event as an insider.

I personally knew my week was off to a great start when I ran into my friend Austin Scelzo of Rock Hearts and On the Trail at the gate in the Atlanta airport. We shared a taxi when we landed in Chattanooga. Although the venue was new to me, the homecoming had already begun, and I was greeted by friends and saw familiar faces all through the lobby and on the elevators of the Marriott, one of the host hotels connected to the convention center.

While there are designated convention hotels associated with the event, BMAM Chair Hideaki Mizuno, who has attended 3 years of WOB events, suggests checking out one of several nearby hotels with lower rates. Some folks also choose air bnbs or local campgrounds in the area.

The first part of the week is the Business Conference, where participants can attend sessions aimed at songwriters, broadcasters, talent buyers and other bluegrass-related topics. BMAM board member Stan Keach is an IBMA veteran and an accomplished songwriter, and often participates in the songwriter-focused educational sessions and song circles. His wife, Liz, joins him on the trip and enjoys the sites of a new city while Stan is in sessions.



BMAM Board Chair Hideaki Mizuno broke out his fiddle to jam in the hotel lobby

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A GUIDE TO LIVE BLUEGRASS IN MAINE *Continued from front page.*

ONE LONGFELLOW SQUARE

181 State Street, Portland, ME 04101

(207) 761-1757 www.onelongfellowsquare.com

Bluegrass is a regular focus at One Longfellow Square; its stage in recent months has featured well-known pickers such as Matt Flinner, Sam Grisman, Portland's own Joe K. Walsh, and Maine favorites Breakin' Strings. Every fall, the venue hosts the WMPG Bluegrass



*Winter lights at One Longfellow Square.
Photo courtesy of Christopher Andrew.*

Spectacular, with several Maine-based bands raising money for USM's beloved radio station. Pop across the street to Pai Men Miyake before the show for some top-notch ramen, but make sure to get to OLS on the early side to get a prime seat. (Though, to be fair, there isn't a bad seat in the house.)

Q&A with Kristen Kresge, Communications Director at One Longfellow Square

Q: *How did bluegrass become such a staple of the One Longfellow Square event calendar?*

A: We've spent the past 15 years cultivating a relationship with the bluegrass community, and it's evolved into something really special. Joe K. Walsh, a former board member who is now an advisor to our board, helped establish bluegrass here from the beginning.

Q: *What makes the OLS experience unique?*

A: The way our venue is set up—it's really wide, shaped like a half moon with only about 10 rows plus two balcony rows—creates this intimate, living room listening experience. You're at eye level with the stage from anywhere in the room, which is perfect for bluegrass where each musician takes their turn in the spotlight.

Our audience is incredibly intentional. People aren't constantly getting up to go to the bar or chatting in the back. When you're here for a show, you're locked in with what's happening on stage. We've worked hard to develop great sound with talented engineers, and that attention to detail really pays off. Whether it's the high-energy excitement of a band like Breakin' Strings or the intimate, world-class performances from artists like Joe K. Walsh, the audience hangs on every note.

Q: *What do you hear from people who love seeing shows at OLS?*

A: When people leave, they're grinning from ear to ear, saying things like "that was the best experience I've ever had" or "I'm going to remember this show forever." We're creating beautiful memories that stick with people.

VINEGAR HILL MUSIC THEATRE

53 Old Post Road, Arundel, ME 04046

207-985-5552 www.vinhillmusic.com



*The Mallett Brothers Band rocks Vinegar Hill.
Photo courtesy of Lee Hetherington*

From April through early December, Vinegar Hill curates a fantastic slate of music—including a steady diet of bluegrass—in a beautiful and rustic space. "Vinegar Hill Music Theatre is an old historic barn built in the late 1800s," says Jeff Beam, the venue's talent buyer, "Is there any setting more appropriate for a bluegrass concert than a charming old barn? All different kinds of live music sounds great inside Vinegar Hill's wooden interior, but there's something extra special about the sound of a bluegrass band cascading around the exposed beams up through the barn's high ceiling."

THE WALDO THEATER

916 Main Street, Waldoboro, ME 04572

(207) 975-6490 www.thewaldotheater.org

The Waldo was built in 1936 as a state-of-the-art movie theatre and now it's home to a thriving non-profit that offers movies, live music, theatre and educational opportunities. Musicians (and fans) have raved about the intimacy and sonic quality of the room, saying it's one of their favorite places to play. "We try to provide a diverse array of musical genres on our calendar," says Keri Lupien, the theater's concert booker and a member of the board of directors, "and with the strong fiddle history in the Midcoast, we've found an especially popular one in bluegrass with the community." A few upcoming bluegrass shows include Sam Grisman, Tim O'Brien and Victor Furtado (Jan. 17) and Della Mae (Mar. 27).

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STONE MOUNTAIN ARTS CENTER

695 Dugway Road, Brownfield, ME 04010
207-935-7292 www.stonemountainartscenter.com

One of the most beautiful rooms in Maine, Stone Mountain Arts Center gives music lovers a chance to see amazing artists in a decidedly intimate setting. “Our room has a great sound for bluegrass, and you can’t beat our Maine country hospitality,” says SMAC founder (and celebrated musician!) Carol Noonan. Indeed, even traveling musicians are beneficiaries of that gracious welcome as they relax backstage in a green room that feels more like a well-appointed AirBNB. In 2026, be on the lookout for artists such as the Gibson Brothers; Edgar Meyer, Mike Marshall and George Meyer; and Maine powerhouse Tricky Britches.

Pictured right: Stone Mountain Arts Center. Photo courtesy of Stone Mountain Arts Center



THE CHOCOLATE CHURCH

804 Washington Street, Bath, ME 04530
207-442-8455 www.chocolatechurcharts.org

This venerable venue features a beautiful 300-seat theater stage as well as an 80-seat club space that serves as a top-tier listening room. The Chocolate Church also hosts a free waterfront concert series just down the road on the banks of the Kennebec River. “We love bluegrass here at the Chocolate Church,” says Executive and Artistic Director Matthew Glassman. “In the last year or so, we’ve had Maine bluegrass artists Tricky Britches and Erica Brown and the Bluegrass Connection. We’ve done a lot with cousin folk traditions like Appalachian fiddle and flat foot dancing with Martha Spencer and the Wonderland Country Band, banjo prodigy Nora Brown, and a host of others.”

Pictured left: Tricky Britches bring the house down at the Chocolate Church.



THE OPERA HOUSE AT BOOTHBAY HARBOR

86 Townsend Avenue, Boothbay Harbor, ME 04538
207-633-5159 www.boothbayoperahouse.com

What coaxes A-list bluegrass stars like Jerry Douglas, Bela Fleck, Sierra Hull, and Steep Canyon Rangers to make regular trips up Route 1 to Boothbay Harbor? It’s more than the beauty of the Maine coastline and the promise of lobster rolls. “Bluegrass acts love landing here,” says Executive Director Cathy Sherrill. “The acoustics in the House are perfect, and the old-time feel of the place is also a perfect backdrop for bluegrass music. Honestly, our audience seems to enjoy all kinds of live music, but any time you can put some dazzlingly fast-pickin’ musicians on stage, they go crazy!” Sherrill notes that bluegrass fans will have lots of reasons to head to Boothbay in 2026, so keep an eye out for updates on the venue’s summer 2026 calendar.



The Steep Canyon Rangers at the Opera House at Boothbay Harbor. Photo courtesy of Peter Southwick.

AN IBMA ADVENTURE IN CHATTANOOGA *Continued from page 2*



BMAM board member Shari Elder with Po' Ramblin' Boys fiddler (and Maine native!) Max Silverstein

Together they enjoy the many showcases that take place in the hotel, convention center, and throughout the downtown venues as part of the Bluegrass Ramble. In the evenings and late into the night, the Ramble features emerging bluegrass bands as well as established bands with new music or new personnel. As a talent buyer, the showcases are instrumental to me, as is the Gig Fair where talent buyers have a chance to connect with bands and agents in a “speed dating” type session. There are also a number of unofficial sponsored showcases including The Bronzwound Suite hosted each year by Maine’s own Darwin Davidson of WERU. Darwin has offered this valuable opportunity to new artists for many years at IBMA WOB.

One of the newer bands I had the opportunity to check out during a showcase was Pythagoras. Started at East Tennessee State University, the band includes Cumberland, Maine, native Grant Dresnok. I had a chance to talk with Grant about his experience at WOB. He describes it as “a whirlwind—the perfect storm of networking, hanging out, getting out of your comfort zone...you look to the left and there’s Jimmy Martin’s guitar, and to the right is Billy Strings in the lobby. You just never know who or what’s around the next corner.”

On Tuesday night, a Kick Off Party was hosted by The Po’ Ramblin Boys with many special guests including members of Sister Sadie and IBMA Executive Director Ken White. Maine’s own Max Silverstein brought the house down with his fiddle playing, and I have to admit I was thrilled to spot Mainer Dale Thurston there sporting a brand new Crooked River Gathering t-shirt there!

Kathy Bestwick is new to Maine and to BMAM, but has been very involved in her home state of Pennsylvania with the Appalachian Fiddle & Bluegrass Association and has been to IBMA the past three years. She attended several educational workshops, as well as presenting one entitled, “Plan & Promote the Best Festival.” In addition to educational sessions, there are a number of town hall and constituent events to allow for networking throughout the various components of the industry.

Although I was busy with production and rehearsals at the theater, there was no way I was going to miss this year’s keynote speech.

Everyone I spoke with agreed with Kathy’s assessment: “Billy Strings was excellent!! He is so authentic and down to earth. His life story is heart wrenching as well as inspirational to all. Seeing him perform throughout the week on stages, hallways and street corners with so many different musicians was a definite highlight!” (If you missed it, search for “Billy Strings keynote address” on YouTube—it’s worth watching!)



BMAM board member Stan Keach with Jimmy Martin’s famous Martin D28.

For Hide, one of his favorite things about the week is “seeing old friends and meeting new ones, including those from overseas (Japan and France).” IBMA makes a real effort to keep the “I” in IBMA, by encouraging participation from people from around the world. They have an International Stage and offer a yearly grant to provide financial assistance to bands traveling to IBMA WOB.

I ran into Hide in the Exhibit Hall one afternoon. He had just been visiting with Steve and Nancy Rogeski from the County Bluegrass Festival, who make the trip regularly to scout bands for their line-up. The Exhibit Hall is a huge opportunity for bands, business owners, and sellers of music-related products to network, engage, and conduct business with their target demographic in a high-impact way. I always make sure to stop and say hello to the Bourgeois Guitar Booth to visit my Maine luthier friends. It can take hours to get all the way around the hall—there is so much to see, live music playing, giveaways, and always someone to stop and chat with.

Hide also highlighted the great jamming that takes place in every nook and cranny with amateurs and professionals blending together and welcoming one another. I caught sight of him and his bass in the lobby jamming late one night with a mix of adults and the talented youngsters involved in the incredible Kids on Bluegrass program that happens each year at the event.

There are two daytime luncheon events during the week: The IBMA Momentum Awards on Wednesday and the IBMA Industry & Distinguished Achievement Awards on Thursday. These are always inspiring events with live performances and the announcements of winners in a number of categories.

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AN IBMA ADVENTURE IN CHATTANOOGA

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I have been lucky enough to be in the audience twice as a nominee with the Thomas Point Beach Bluegrass Festival in the Event of the Year category and once when we won the award. I was also in Nashville in 2009 when Pati Crooker was honored with a Distinguished Achievement Award. This year Austin Scelzo (CT) was honored with the Industry Involvement Award and Rick Lang (NH) was named Mentor of the Year. I'm always excited when New Englanders are being recognized for their outstanding contributions. Thursday night is billed as the biggest night in bluegrass, featuring once-in-a-lifetime moments and outstanding performances by the best in the genre at the IBMA Bluegrass Music Awards. The red carpet is rolled out and everyone sparkles for this star-studded evening. It was such an honor for me to be involved this year as a co-producer. The show was hosted by Steve Martin and Alison Brown. Some of my responsibilities in the weeks leading up to the big night included collecting media assets, shaping the run-of-show, editing the script, coordinating the rehearsals, and then moving presenters and performers onto the stage throughout the show.

My favorite part of the awards show has always been the collaboration of artists that come together for unprecedented performances and this year was no exception. The finale featured our hosts, along with Del McCoury, Gena Britt, Jim Lauderdale, Sierra Hull, and Billy Strings, and many others! The Hall of Fame presentations are also a big highlight. Kathy Bestwick shared that she "was especially moved by the 2025 Hall of Fame Inductee of Arnold Shultz, an African American, born into a family of former slaves. After attending the Rooted Rhythms session, I had a good deal of history and insight into who he was and what his contribution was to bluegrass. He had a tremendous impact on Bill Monroe, who played music with him at dances in the late '20s. His influence shaped the development of bluegrass music and Monroe's relationship with him was pivotal in shaping Monroe's musical journey. Shultz died in 1931 at age 45, and his grandson accepted his award." Other Hall of Fame inductees were The Bluegrass Cardinals and Hot Rize—and even Red Knuckles & the Trailblazers were seen in the building!

The end of the week is Bluegrass Live!, a dynamic two-day outdoor music festival in downtown Chattanooga showcasing top bluegrass artists across multiple stages. It blends performances, food trucks, and vendor markets with both a ticketed area and free community stages to celebrate the spirit and culture of bluegrass music. There were non-stop performances and both the music and the weather were HOT! Next year the event will stay in Chattanooga but the dates for World of Bluegrass will move to October 20-24, so hopefully it will be a bit cooler.

The whole week is exhilarating—and exhausting! If you plan on attending IBMA, make sure you give yourself a few days to recover after getting home. But for any fan of bluegrass music, the event is absolutely worth the trip. It's a celebration of this music we love and the people who are celebrating the history of bluegrass and charting a bold path forward for this uniquely American musical form. If visiting IBMA sounds like your kind of fun, just reach out to any of us who have been in the past. We can share our advice, tips and strategies for making the most of this wonderful event.

A REPORT FROM THE BMAM ARCHIVES

By Joe Kennedy

Since our induction into the Maine Country Music Hall of Fame in 2014, Nellie and I have been involved with archiving the history of Maine's country and bluegrass music. In addition, I serve on the board, the nomination and annual induction ceremony committees, and Nellie volunteers to work on museum displays, and organizing while both of us work on clean up days, etc. We also had the opportunity to set up a room dedicated to Maine's bluegrass history.

2026 marks BMAM's 30th anniversary and BMAM will be celebrating all year in a number of ways. Since its inception, the Hall of Fame has inducted many Maine bluegrass musicians and promoters. In the coming year, Nellie and I will be searching for items to share in the BMAM newsletter, on the website, and through social media. We'll be focusing on Maine bluegrass pioneers and early events that shaped our ongoing history. It's all there in posters, flyers, recordings, press stories, instruments, and memorabilia.

One of BMAM's cherished items on display is a poster of Maine's first bluegrass music festival held in 1972 in Phippsburg. Hall of Famer Jimmy Cox and the Pine Tree State Blue Grass Music Association promoted this event. Of course, bluegrass in Maine didn't start in 1972. It came to Maine via strong radio broadcasts from the south that reached to Maine and beyond to the Canadian provinces.

In the '20s, '30s, and early '40s, before Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs were shaping modern bluegrass, mountain music, in the form of early barn dance bands was all the rage. The bands were heavy on the fiddles, often with guitars, bass, mandolins, four-string banjos and accordions. This music—along with the Carter Family, Jimmy Rodgers, Southern gospel, and brother duets—laid the groundwork for what we love and emulate today.

All of this history is represented in the exhibits at the MCMHOF Museum. One of the first inductees was Mellie Dunham, a fiddler in the 1930's that Henry Ford was very fond of and invited to perform on a tour of Europe. In the 1940s, another Maine inductee, Zeke Hamilton, had a string band that was popular for years playing songs that were learned from listening to the radio.

In the 1950's Al Hawkes was performing in duet acts and bluegrass bands. In his Event Records studio he was recording bands including the Lily Brothers. By the 1960s, bluegrass (the NEW mountain music featuring Scruggs-style banjo) was firmly entrenched in Maine. Bluegrass musicians from out of state were moving to Maine and an audience for future festivals was growing.

Our small dedicated work group of HOF members and volunteers will be considering ways to celebrate BMAM's 30th anniversary year. Please consider volunteering or visiting the museum below the Silver Spur – 272 Lewiston Rd. Mechanic Falls. Open 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 10am – 3pm. For information regarding the museum or how you might help, please contact me at joekennedy@tds.net or call/text 207-717-5480.

MAINE SONGWRITERS SHINE AT 2025 PODUNK BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

Two Maine songwriters were among the winners of the 2025 Podunk Bluegrass Festival songwriters' contest.

Evan Richert of Brewer, a longtime member of BMAM, won second place for his song "On a Bluegrass Breeze." The song was written as a jam song -- a tribute to those who years ago welcomed his wife Joan and him into their weekly jam circle. Several were paper workers or associated with the paper mills that, up and down the Penobscot River Valley, were closing at that time. But at the jams they seemed to set aside whatever worries they might have had and welcomed the newcomers with patience, encouragement, and good humor. Joan went on to establish BMAM's monthly Eastern Jam in Brewer.

The recording of the song was performed by Steve Roy (lead and mandolin), Whitney Roy (guitar and harmony), Eli Gilbert (banjo and harmony), Ellen Carlson (fiddle), and Kris Day (bass).

Acclaimed singer-songwriter Sara Trunzo, based in Waldo County, took third place with "Free for the Taking." The song reflects Sara's roots in bluegrass, folk, and traditional American music. It will resonate with anyone who has ever put a lawn mower, chair, or an old wood stove out front with a "Free" sign on it -- "all you got to do is get here first."

These songs, as well as the first place song by New York's Buddy Guido ("A Night Like This"), can be heard at www.podunkbluegrass.com/Podunk-song-writing-competition-winners.

BANDED of BREWING
BIDDEFORD, MAINE

EVERY 2ND + 4TH TUESDAY
6-8PM

BLUEGRASS JAM
WITH MELISSA BRAGDON CARON

Y'ALL COME! THE BENEFITS OF BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH BLUEGRASS MUSIC

By Melissa Bragdon Caron

Bluegrass music naturally brings people together. The bluegrass community is full of welcoming musicians of all ages, who encourage and inspire each other. Something that sets this style apart is how accessible it is for all ability levels—and the general consistencies that allow for people to play together with ease. Whether at a festival, a jam, or just sitting around a campfire, bluegrass music has a way of bringing the community together.



Considering playing music with others? There are so many benefits! Research shows that playing music can improve cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and learning—which is so good for both the developing and the aging brain. It has also been found that those who play music with others report a higher mental wellbeing and lower levels of depression. Many musicians benefit from the social aspect of playing in a group—building friendships, strengthening families, and creating a healthy outlet for young people.

Wondering if you're good enough to join in a bluegrass jam? If you can play G, C, D, and A chords, the answer is yes! Feeling a little nervous is totally normal and healthy—even the greatest pickers have had to overcome their fears. A piece of advice for those learning to play with others: Be sure to communicate and listen. When the solo opportunity comes to you, be watching and communicate whether or not you want to solo. When someone next to you is singing or playing a solo, listen and support their efforts. Don't worry too much—just do your best and have fun!

Looking for people to jam with? There are so many opportunities to play with others right here in Maine! BMAM hosts regular jams throughout the state, and there are also regular jams happening at 317 Main Community Music Center in Yarmouth and Banded Brewing in Biddeford (which is hosted by yours truly!). In addition, Maine has some great bluegrass festivals, music camps, and opportunities to learn in group lessons and ensembles led by amazing teachers.

Find out more about what's happening through organizations such as BMAM or the Boston Bluegrass Union, check out your favorite social media feed, or just ask around with the friends you jam with. Our bluegrass community here in Maine is a welcoming one, so come on out and join the fun!

Melissa Bragdon Caron is a Scarborough-based fiddler and music educator with more than 25 years of experience. She's a certified Wernick Method teacher, and is the director and coach of the New England Fiddle Ensemble (www.nefiddleensemble). Melissa also is the organizer of the Fiddleheads Acoustic Jam Camp (www.fiddleheadscamp.com) and runs a weekly open jam at Banded Brewing in Biddeford. To learn more about Melissa—and to find out when she's playing with bands such as Cumberland Crossing, Sugar Hill Stringband, Fiddlers Three, and Jerks of Grass—visit www.melissabragdon-caron.com.

BAND SPOTLIGHT: WHITE MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS

By Taylor Smith



White Mountain Ramblers From l.-r. Nathaniel Haas, Ben Rossetter, Robbie Neeb, Luke Bartol.

While they're a relatively new group, White Mountain Ramblers are quickly establishing themselves in Maine's bluegrass scene. Fiddler Luke Bartol, guitarist Robbie Neeb, bassist Nathaniel Haas, and mandolinist Ben Rossetter came together in early 2024 and have built a devoted following through their shows at venues ranging from breweries to festival stages. I caught up with Luke to talk about the band's journey so far and what's next for White Mountain Ramblers.

Taylor: *How did the band come together?*

Luke: We met on Facebook at the beginning of 2024, when Nathaniel and I responded to Robbie's post on Facebook looking for bluegrass musicians to play with. I originally played mandolin (the post didn't include fiddle for some reason, make what jokes you will), but switched over after revealing that I had played mandolin for about 6 months but fiddle my whole life. Ben joined us at the beginning of 2025, rounding out our sound with his flaming mandolin licks.

Taylor: *How would you describe your sound? What are your influences?*

Luke: We're a variety pack for sure! Whether it's diving into Robbie's Tony Rice obsession, jamming on Nathaniel's favorite Dead tunes, or letting Ben croon a piece of John Prine, we touch on the whole 'grass' spectrum. It's fun to push and pull each other in different ways, I enjoy forcing the band to play driving dance tunes from my contra dance upbringing, but also love to get pulled into a 10-minute-long jam break while Nathaniel tap dances on his pedal board. Long story short, we like to play music that gets people grooving, whether its time-honored standards or a bluegrass version of the Monster Mash.

Taylor: *Do you write original material? If so, what's the band's songwriting process?*

Luke: Robbie and Nathaniel are our only outed songwriters at the moment, but boy are they prolific! They've brought lots of songs to the band from their past, as well as creating new ones that reflect our shared journey. We've loved to see how the songs evolve as we change arrangements, add verses, and riff off one another, so no time playing it is the same.

Taylor: *What have been the highlights for the band since you started? Great gigs, road trips, festival jam sessions, etc.?*

Luke: The highlight for us has really been the community we've found in this music. From the home we've found at Orange Bike Brewing, to all the incredible people we've jammed with at festivals like Crooked River, to bringing bluegrass to the mainstream with the Hearts of Pine, we get so much joy from playing music that brings people together. We're perhaps an unlikely, intergenerational group (representing 4 different decades soon), but are so thankful that this music brought us together for this incredible friendship.

Taylor: *I saw a video of the tune you came up with for Portland Hearts of Pine. How did that come about?*

Luke: We've been lucky enough to partner with the Hearts of Pine team in their Humans of Hearts series after some of their staff saw us jamming on the Eastern Promenade in Portland. The love of community and bringing people together was something that we really shared, so one day during a shoot for this, Nathaniel showed us a tune he had written for the occasion, and it was instantly one of our favorites. UTFH!

Taylor: *What's in store for the band?*

Luke: We're currently working on recording our first album and hope to have that ready to share this spring! It's going to be a good winter of gigs, from our residency at Orange Bike Brewing every first and third Thursday, to ski gigs at Steam Mill Brewing up at Sunday River, to the stage of the Press Room in Portsmouth. Keep an eye on our Instagram and Facebook for all those and more!

For more information about White Mountain Ramblers, including live dates, check out www.whitemountainramblers.com.

MAINE
COUNTRY MUSIC
HALL of FAME
and MUSEUM

272 Lewiston Rd, Mechanic Falls, ME 04256
To schedule a tour call: Paul Main 207-490-2001
or Ken Brooks 207-654-2227

SCENE IN MAINE

Here’s a quick recap of cool things that happened in Maine’s bluegrass world recently, from hot bands swinging through Maine to pickers getting together at BMAM’s monthly jams.

What’s been going on in your bluegrass world? Reach out to Bluegrass Express Editor Taylor Smith at tsmith@mainebluegrass.org to share your photos and stories. WE’D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!



FLIGHT 317 AT MAINE BEER COMPANY

In November, the Flight 317 Ensemble—a group of young musicians that call 317 Main Community Music Center home—lit up Freeport’s Maine Beer Company with a set of driving bluegrass music. The event was a fundraiser for 317 Main and featured several other musicians showcasing the breadth of 317 Main’s musical offerings.



ROCK HEARTS DELIVERS YET ANOTHER STELLAR SHOW FOR BMAM

For the third year, New England bluegrass powerhouse Rock Hearts brought their prodigious talents to the Center Theatre in Dover-Foxcroft in October. The very-well-attended event was presented by BMAM and organized expertly by board members Joe and Nellie Kennedy and John McKusick (with assists from a number of other BMAM members!). *Photo courtesy of Laurie LaViolette.*



BMAM BOARD MEMBERS GET GRASSY IN PORTLAND

Board members Shari Elder, Todd Ketcham and Taylor Smith met up at Portland House of Music in November for a rocking double bill with East Nash Grass and AJ Lee & Blue Summit. We saw lots of familiar faces, BMAM members and festival friends. Great turnout for a chilly pre-holiday night!



PICKERS GATHER AT BMAM’S SOUTHERN JAM

Indoor jam season is in full swing! A great crowd attended the Southern Jam in Yarmouth in October. The jam is held monthly at the First Parish Congregational Church at 116 Main St. and features two floors of picking.

WINTER INDOOR JAM SEASON

BMAM's indoor jams offer a great way to keep meeting up with friends and fellow pickers throughout the winter and early spring.

BMAM hosts three jams on a monthly basis: The Eastern Jam in Brewer, the Southern Jam in Yarmouth, and the Farmington Jam.

For all jams, admission is \$5 for BMAM members and \$7 for non-members.

Also, a new Aroostook County jam is launching in 2026! Stay tuned for details.

FARMINGTON JAM

The Farmington Jam is temporarily moving while the Farmington Community Center undergoes renovations. The Farmington Jam will take place at St. Joseph's Hall, 130 Quebec Street. Stay tuned for more information.

FARMINGTON JAM DATES:

- December 28 • January 25 • February 22
- March 22 • April 26 • May 24 (tentative)

EASTERN JAM

The Eastern Jam takes place at the Old Town Riverside Grange at 1266 North Main St., Brewer. The jam typically runs from 12:00-3pm. It's open to levels of players and features two floors for jamming. For more information, contact Brewster Bassett at 207-404-3111.

EASTERN JAM DATES:

- January 4 • February 1 • March 1

Note: No April 5th jam due to the Easter holiday.

SOUTHERN JAM

The Southern Jam takes place from 1pm-4pm at the First Parish Congregational Church at 116 Main St., Yarmouth. The venue offers two floors of jamming, with plenty of room for pickers of all abilities. For more information, reach out to BMAM board member Bob Bergesch at rbergesch@gmail.com or 207-831-8908.

YARMOUTH JAM DATES:

- January 11 • February 8
- March 8 • April 19

**Watch for BMAM updates on Facebook
or at www.mainebluegrass.org.**



Bluegrass Music Association of Maine

BMAM NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERSHIPS

9/1/25 - 11/30/25

NEW MEMBERS

Randy Adjutant	Donald Bissell
Heather Adrian	Darlene Burgess
Mike Christy	Roger Drouin
& Sue Bowser	Tim FitzPatrick
Brad McKenzies	Dane Frost
Ben Swanney	Donna R. Harvey
& Jacob Swanney	Greg Quinlan
Bill Dalbec	Harland E. Stanley
Deborah Katz	Luke Bartol
Ricky Prince	Mike Bowlds
Amy (Alberta)	Daniel Gruenstein
& John Shelby	

MEMBER RENEWALS

James Henderson	Roberta & Robert Jarvis
Vanessa Jones	Christine LaPointe
& Jerry Adams	Laurie LaViolette
Lori Conway	Laurie & Jay
Ryan Heffernan	Littlefield-Baas
Kathy & Chuck Bestwick	Willie Marquart
John W. Brooks	Roxy Perry
& Harri-Ann Porter	Cheryl Piazza
Mike & Patti Burns	Terry & Tina Spearrin
Steve Davis	Joseph Tourigny
Chauncey Devin	Kevin Welch
& Jessica Spoto	Bonnie Guerrette
Daniel Mills	& Tim Joy
& Wendy Molin	James & Dawn McGinnis
Richard Moskowitz	John & Sharon McKusick
Douglas Alley	John Sparrow
Wayne & Estella Bennett	& Shirley Hamilton
Jay & Leslie Dientes	John Ganz
Jessup Henderson	Don Smith
& Alexa Bartley	David Streeter
Mark and Darci Hodges	

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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 a 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.

COPY DEADLINE

Copy deadline is the 15th of the month prior to publication date. Ad rates are for camera-ready copy. Ads to be made up from scratch have an additional cost and must be sent by the 5th of the month. Payments must accompany ads when they are submitted.

SEND ALL ADVERTISING TO:

Bluegrass Express
Re: Advertising
PO Box 9
Dexter, Maine 04930

The Bluegrass Express is...

a quarterly publication of the Newsletter Committee.

For more information on how you can become involved, contact any committee member.

Please email any news, photos, article information, or anything you find pertaining to bluegrass in Maine to tsmith@mainebluegrass.com or mail to this address:

BMAM

Re: Newsletter
P.O. Box 9
Dexter, Maine 04930

Advertising Rates

25 Words _____	\$5.00
Business Card _____	\$10.00
1/4 Page _____	\$15.00
1/2 Page _____	\$20.00



www.MaineBluegrass.org

Your source for Bluegrass information!!!

*Please check your membership status!
 Thanks!*



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NEWSLETTERS ARE SENT BY EMAIL

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

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MEMBERSHIP DUES: Solo \$15.00 Duet \$20.00

NEW **RENEWAL**

FOR ADMIN USE ONLY

Member received: membership card welcome letter sticker db updated Payment type: check or cash

REV: 2019-06-01

JOIN THE BLUEGRASS MUSIC ASSOCIATION OF MAINE

A one year membership includes:
 Quarterly Newsletter
 Discounts to BMAM sponsored events

DATE: _____ EVENT: _____

I am a: Fan Musician Band Member

Primary Instrument: _____

Band Name: _____

Volunteer Opportunities: *(check if interested)*

S. Jam (Yarmouth) E. Jam (Brewer)

Teaching Newsletter Festivals

Other things I can help with: _____
