



“Appalachia is My Country”

A Musical Journey of our Appalachian Ancestors
Presented By

Common Strings

A program designed to educate and inform students of all ages, about the Historical values of the music and culture of the people who settled the Southern Appalachian mountains.

The purpose of this program is to promote and encourage creativity and artistic talents in the students, and to kindle the flames of interest in their own heritage and culture. This 40-45 min program will teach and entertain students from K to College, and CONTINUED EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS AND SENIORS.

Program Outline

- Introduction: The melting pot of the mountains. Who were these people?
- The instruments: A demonstration and description of the instruments used.
- More than just a song : Demonstration of the songs and style of singing
Unique to Appalachia
- The Making of a Band : How mountain bands were formed and the impact they
have today. Demonstration of early American Songs
- Questions and Answers : CS will interact with students in a Q & A session

**Program may be altered, upon request, to emphasize or expand a particular subject, (i.e.),*

History, Creative Writing, Songs of the Civil War, Instrument Construction or Vocals.

Fees start at \$495 for one 45-minute presentation, or \$750 for two same day programs

Program will contain 25 minutes of Music and Lecture and 20 minutes of student participation in Questions and Answers session with Darron and Vanessa Nichols

**Full Day Workshops and 30 minute Concert with complete Ensemble 1200.00
(additional travel expenses may apply according to distance from Georgia)**

Appalachia is my Country Program

History: As the pages of history are wrote, a small but important part of our past is sometimes over looked. One can easily take for granted this portion of our lives, but the fact is that music was and still is a key factor in the lives of the Appalachian people. In years past , not only was music a form of, or the only entertainment the Mountain people had, it was a way to remember stories and events and pass them down through the ages. Music to the Appalachian was like water to a river. It starts high in the mountain as a trickle, one voice, one lone fiddle, then flows down through the hollows gathering more, more voices, more instruments.

The Music: When the people of the mountains first arrived in this new country, most brought with them nothing more than sheer determination and the cloths on their backs. That determination brought them across a vast ocean of un certainties and led them through the wilderness to a place in this new America that favored their home lands. Here the mountains provided every thing that the Appalachian people needed, food, shelter and music. The fiddle was the most popular instrument of the mountain people. It was small and easy to carry. Its origins can be traced to biblical times. The crafty mountain man could whittle a fiddle out of the materials found in his natural surroundings, or if he was lucky, a few strands of steel wire from the outside world made a choice instrument. The banjo would be the second to the fiddle, its roots can be traced back to Africa and brought to the southern plantations in the 17th and 18th century. Like the fiddle, the banjo could be made from wood and animal products. The guitar would enter by way of North Africa immigrants and so organized music flowed through the hill and hollows of southern Appalachia.

A Time of Change: In the late 1800s the rail road cut a path through the heart of the mountains. The black diamond, coal, was discovered in the Appalachians. But not only did the rail road and the mines change the landscape, it changed the

lives of the mountain people. Coal mining met jobs and cash money. With the new jobs and connection to the outside world, the music of Appalachia would slowly evolve. Store bought instruments from mail order catalogues would soon take the place of home made fiddles and banjos. Instruments from around the world like the mandolin from Italy could now be shipped to the remote mountains thanks to Sears and Roebuck.

With the combination of new instruments, and new cultures mixing together old ballads like Barbara Allen, Boxville girl and Fair and Tender Ladies were set to music filled with emotions and syncopated timings. The old ballads were played and sung in their native minor keys, while fiddle tunes were played in standard key such as G, A and D. The Appalachian people developed their own style of singing. With their distinct dialect and stern personality the songs reflected a harsh and brutal life. Their voices were pitched high, almost a cry gave the songs a haunting sound. The timing and phrasing of this music made it unique to only the mountains. No other style of music had lyrics of such morbid and heart breaking topics than Appalachian music.

Closing : Music to the Appalachian was like water to a river. It starts high in the mountain as a trickle, one voice, one lone fiddle, then flows down through the hollows gathering more, more voices, more instruments. The music holds the same properties as water. Both life giving and life taking forces abide. The music in America owes homage to the people of Appalachia. Be it blues or bluegrass, folk or rock, soul or gospel, the origins can be traced back to those self supportive and self sufficient Mountain People of the Appalachians

The Instruments: Of all the instruments used in bluegrass music, the *Guitar* is probably the most commonly recognized. The six string acoustic guitar, which is said to have originated in Spain, has been a primary instrument in many types of music for centuries and is used as both a lead and rhythm instrument in bluegrass music. The guitar's sound is produced by striking the strings with a small plastic chip known as a "flat pick." The eight string *Mandolin* and four string *Violin* both date back to medieval times. The mandolin was originally constructed out of wood in the shape of a gourd, but the late nineteenth century version flattened out the back, much like the back of the guitar, for better tone and increased volume (hence it is often referred to as the "flat back" mandolin). As with the guitar, the mandolin is played with a flat pick. The *violin* has essentially maintained its original shape and is played with a bow which utilizes animal hair (from horses' tails) stretched tightly across a long stick. The bow is drawn across the strings of the instrument in order to produce its sound. The violin and fiddle are one and the same instrument, but bluegrass and country fiddlers play the instrument with a very different feel and technique from that of classical and jazz violinists. The large *String Bass* looks like a huge violin and is actually the largest member of the violin

family.

The *Five String Banjo* is actually a descendant of a three string instrument (one string was shorter and higher in pitch than the other two) brought to this country from Africa in the eighteenth century. The fifth (bass) string was added in the mid-1800's. The most prominent use of the five string banjo today is in bluegrass and country music. Bluegrass banjo is played in a "three finger style" in which metal "finger picks" are placed directly on the index and middle fingers and a plastic pick is placed on the thumb. The modern four string banjo does not have the shorter string and is used primarily in Dixieland Jazz music.

Words to Know

1. Country Music: In the early 1600's, early settlers spread to the Carolinas, Tennessee and Kentucky; stories reflecting daily life were put into songs and tunes, then passed along at social gatherings.

Guitar: Six strings with fretted neck; shaped somewhat like a violin but has flat top and back with rounded sides. In the 20th century it was popular in country and folk music; plucked with a flat pick.

Banjo: Five strings for bluegrass and country, four strings for Dixieland jazz; long fretted neck with skin or plastic stretched across the top; played by plucking with fingers or with picks.

Mandolin: Eight strings (arranged in pairs), fretted neck with flat back and curved sides; plucked with a flat pick.

String Bass: Largest and lowest sounding member of violin family; shape similar to the violin; usually played with a bow but is plucked with the fingers in bluegrass music.

Dobro: Six strings; Also known as the resonophonic guitar; predecessor to modern steel guitar; played with instrument laying flat (strings facing up); a steel bar is used to fret the strings which are plucked with finger picks.

Fiddle: Same as violin; smallest and highest sounding member of stringed instrument family; played with a bow; bluegrass "fiddlers" play with a different "feel" and "technique" from classical violinists; however, both take years of practice to master.

Form: All elements that distinguish music from noise.

Rhythm: Beat or pulse of the music; using 2/4, 3/4, etc.

Tempo: Rate or speed of the music; slow, fast, etc.

Pitch: Names of the various tones in the musical scale; octave=c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c.

Melody: Arrangement of notes to produce a leading song or tune.

Unison: Singing or playing identical tones at the same time.

Harmony: Voices or instruments performing different, melodically pleasing tones at the same time; can be higher or lower than the melody.

Other Terms:

Acoustic Instruments: Played without amplifiers or other means of electrification; can produce their own sound.

Pluck: To cause an instrument to sound by striking or picking its strings

Pick: Also called a plectrum or flat pick; made of hard material such as plastic or metal; used to pluck the strings

Resource Materials

Periodicals

Bluegrass Now
P.O.Box 2020
Rolla, MO 65402
(573) 341-7335, (800) 736-0125
Bgn@fidnet.com www.bluegrassnow.com

Bluegrass Unlimited
P.O.Box 771
Warrenton, VA 20188-0771
(540) 349-8181, (800) 258-7427
Info@bluegrassmusic.com www.bluegrassmusic.com

Banjo Newsletter
P.O.Box 3418
Annapolis, MD 21403-0418
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International Bluegrass
1620 Frederica Street
Owensboro, KY 42301
(270) 684-9025, (888) GET-IBMA
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Video (800) 545-7467

On Line Support

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