

Winfield Winner

Bruce Graybill

In 1982 Bruce Graybill went with friends to watch the Walnut Valley Mandolin Contest in Winfield, Kansas — “caught the bug” and bought his first mandolin, built by arch-top guitar maker Jim Triggs.

“While there, I learned one tune from fiddler Larry Cain — Liberty. After he taught it to me I tagged around after jammers playing it constantly. They finally said that they didn’t care if I followed them around or even if I played, but please don’t play Liberty any more! Funny thing is, I still like that tune.”

In 1998 Missourian Bruce Graybill of Kansas City won the Walnut Valley Mandolin Contest with Kelly Lancaster of Texas placing second and Adam Wright of Kentucky placing third.

Bruce played Limerock and Prelude #2 by Rafael Calace in the first round and Weetabix and Russian Rag in the final round. He played all four contest pieces unaccompanied.

Previously Bruce had competed 11 times, had been in the finals five times and had placed third in 1995. He also won the 1998 Kansas State Mandolin Championship three times, 1990, 1995 and 1998. On guitar he won the 1997 Kansas State Flatpicking Guitar Championship and the 1995 Dogwood Music Festival Guitar Championship.

The mandolin that Bruce played at Winfield is a Monteleone Grand Artist (1996) that he had John Monteleone build for him.

“It has a slightly wider fretboard than a standard F-5 and eases some of the fatigue that I get from playing on smaller necks. It was close to a four-year wait for the build process, but was certainly worth the time and monetary investment.

“I have become convinced that the level of custom luthiery has markedly improved in mandolins in this part of the century. I have had the great pleasure of playing about six Lloyd Loar F-5s to date, most of them at Classical Mandolin Society of America’s conventions and Winfield, and I believe a lot of the Monteleones, Nuggets and other top builders will easily rival the Loars over time.”

Bruce’s musical life began in grade school as he sat for

hours “making up stuff” on his mother’s piano. In fourth grade he took up trumpet in school and at 13 was playing a small guitar by ear.

By the time he was 19 and just out of high school, he was lead guitarist in a rock band, Ebony Blues, but “that didn’t last long.” He was unaware that the other band members (Canadians) were in the country illegally and they were arrested while playing at a Marine Base in North Carolina!

After returning from his first Walnut Valley trip, Bruce was soon playing in the quasi-traditional One for the Road Bluegrass Band. Later he played for eight years with the couple who had introduced him to Winfield in a local and regional bluegrass band, Drastic Measures.

By 1992, Bruce was recording originals — jazz, swing, bluegrass — “with David Grisman being my heaviest influence at that time.”

Currently he performs as a solo artist as singer, songwriter, mandolinist and guitarist and also with the acoustic jazz and swing ensemble, The Knights of the Blue Fesque, a 30s to 40s “big band” made up of all strings “playing big band stuff with obscure harmonies.

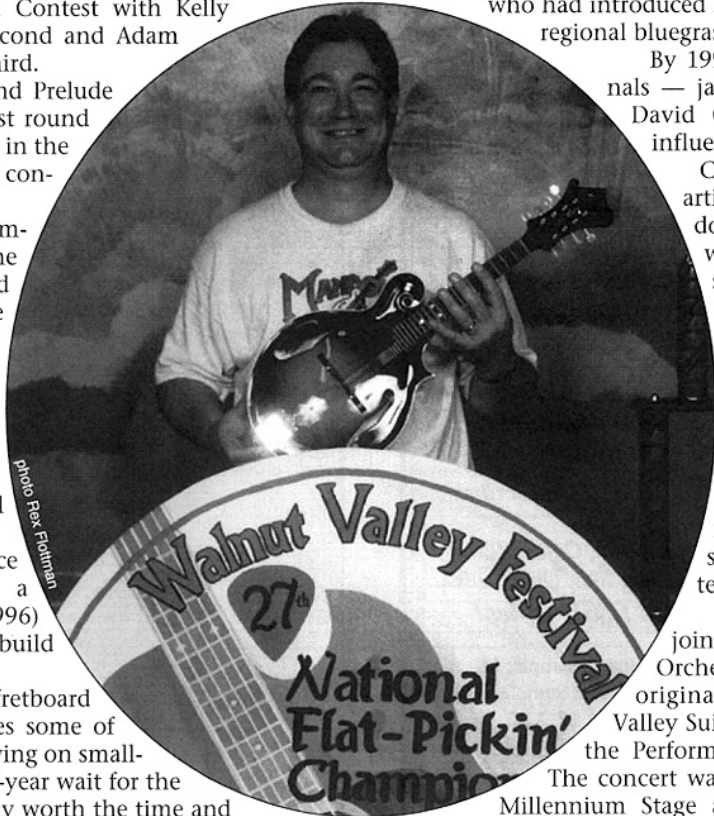
Bruce says, “Life and my choices in it continue to propel me forward at an astonishing pace!” And that certainly seems to be true to his character.

In February of this year he joined the Providence Mandolin Orchestra for a performance of his original composition “the Walnut Valley Suite” at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC.

The concert was a part of a series called The Millennium Stage and represented the state of Rhode Island. The suite is divided into three movements: The Wake, Ritual Dance and The Procession.

The Suite by Bruce Graybill “topped the evening,” according to the Mandolin Journal, official newsletter of the Classical Mandolin Society of America. “The program seems to portend the future and give support to the rise of popularity of the mandolin in the United States.”

An active member of the society, Bruce is presently composing works for mandolin orchestra.



He composes in real time with a MIDI mandolin. "I enjoy composing this way.

"I presently use a custom, 5-string, electric mandolin with a Roland GK-2A hex-divided pickup into a Roland GI-10 Guitar MIDI interface and take this into a Mac running Finale music publishing software and out to a 64-voice synthesizer module and a printer.

"What it really enables me to do is input notes a bit faster and playback compositions on the synth in real time to truly get an idea of sound. If I compose a piece in six parts for mandolin orchestra, it is difficult to really see all the subtle interplay of voices." But composing with the midi mandolin, "I can hear it all together ... makes a huge difference for me!"

Bruce also is writing a mandolin instruction book, "Seventy Seven Head Banging Hot Licks for the Procrastinating Mandolinist," which he hopes to release with a companion CD. He plans to have the project ready for the printer late this year.

He has written out many twin mandolin arrangements of public domain works — including that first mandolin tune, which he learned back in 1982 and says he still likes.

From here, Bruce plans to continue getting his sound studio together, write classical duets and mandolin orchestra works. He currently is focused on the 1870 to 1920s Italian classical music of Rafael Calace and Carlo Muniere with their romantic virtuosity and blistering preludes. ♪

Discography:

Mandocranium — 1992, Mando Kinetics, MK01.

Ten original instrumentals, a blend of bluegrass, swing, jazz. Heavily influenced by David Grisman's work, Bruce Graybill's strongest early influence as a mandolinist. The performers are




Spontaneous Combustion, an active Kansas City-based band doing mostly bluegrass-style rock and pop tunes.

Live Bluegrass From The Heart of America — 1993, KCBBR.

Two cuts with Drastic Measures, former progressive bluegrass band in the Kansas City area. Features several area bands recorded live during a three-day festival, Kansas City Boulevard Bluegrass Revival.

The Walnut Valley Suite — To be released soon.

Bruce's original mandolin orchestra composition, recorded by the Providence Mandolin Orchestra of Providence Rhode Island.



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