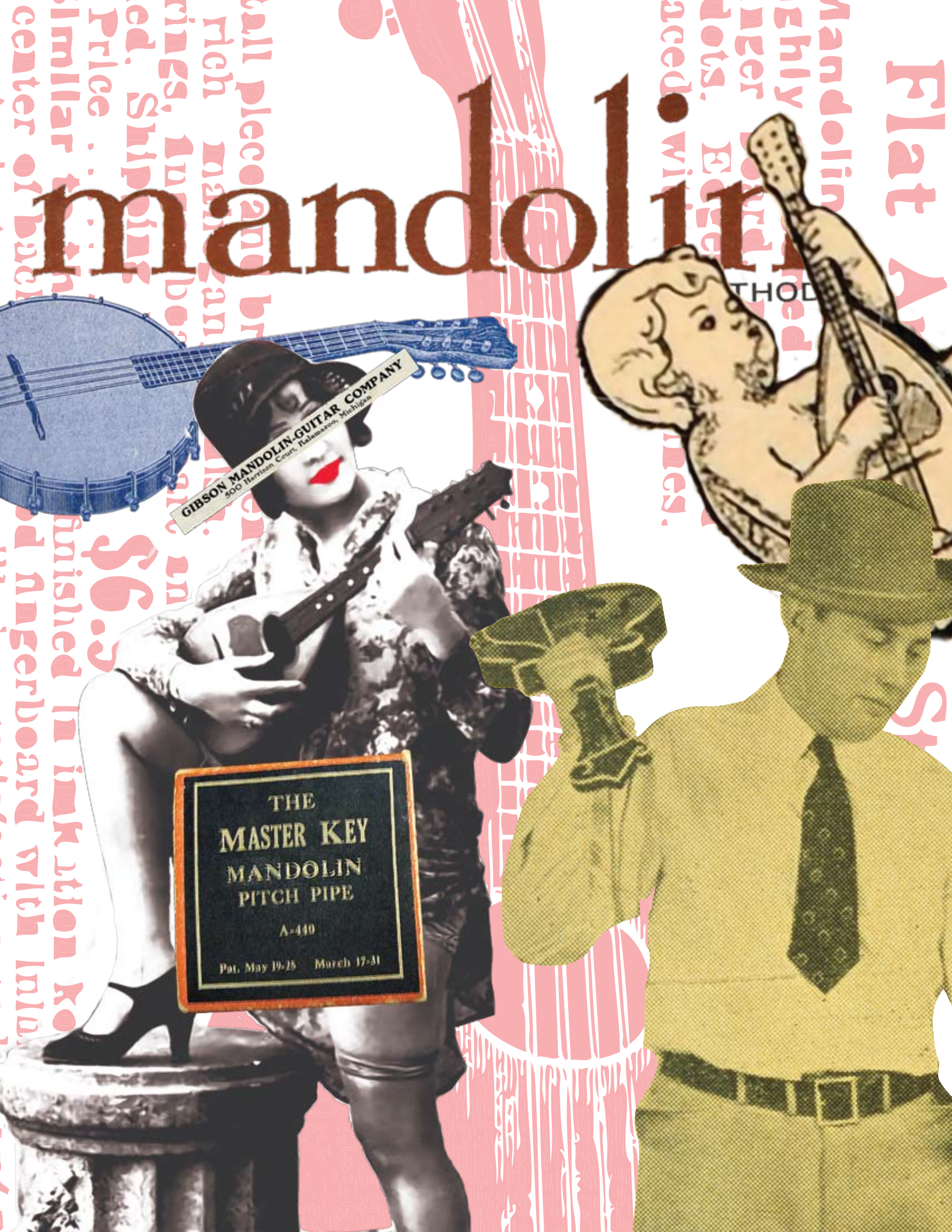
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THAT OLD-TIME MANDOLIN

by Cary Fagan

Everyone knows that in much of old-time music, the fiddle leads while the banjo is its close companion. The guitar might be a later addition but its steady rhythm and arpeggio runs make it a welcome member. And if a bass player comes along—well, a good, steady thumping adds a great foundation.

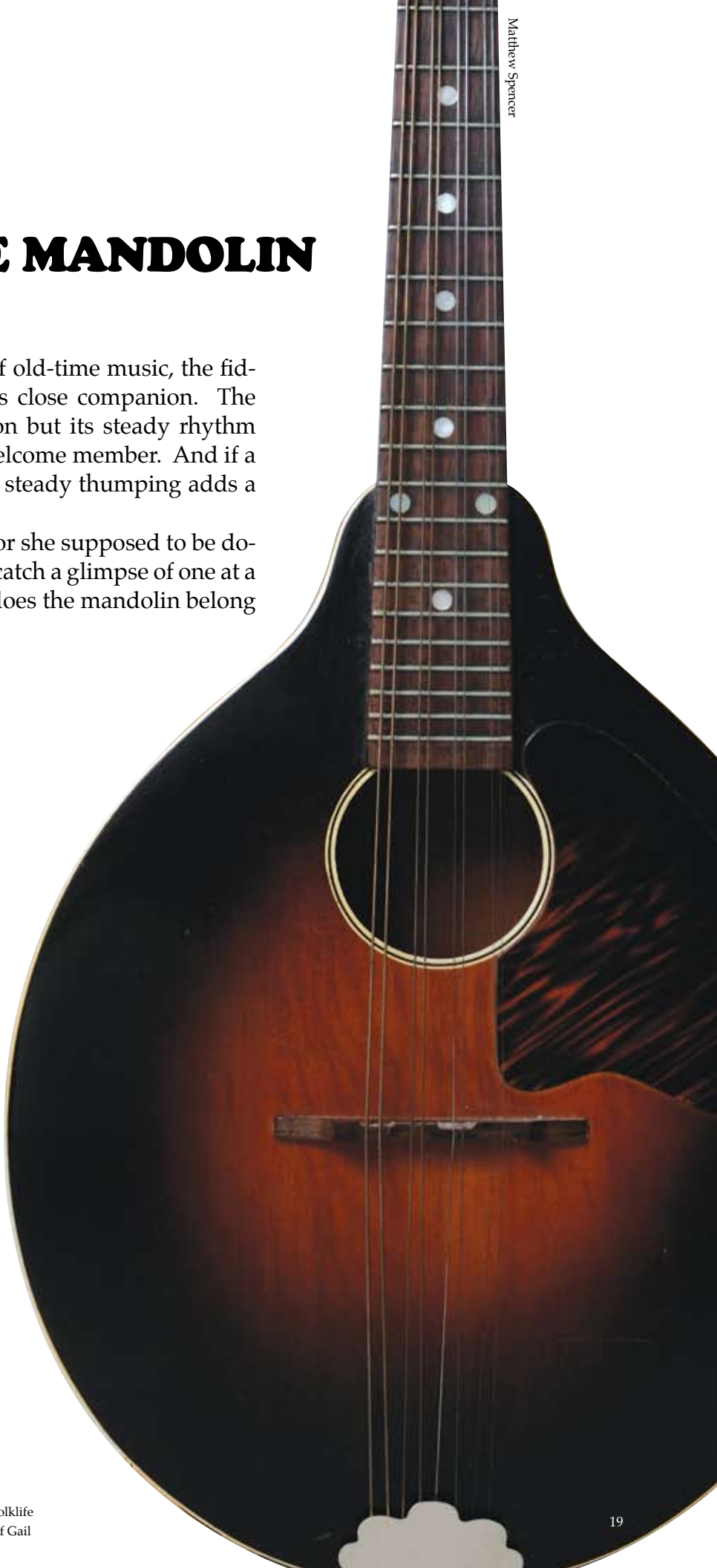
But the mandolin player? What is he or she supposed to be doing? If you watch closely enough you'll catch a glimpse of one at a jam here and there. But where exactly does the mandolin belong in old-time?

That's a question that has surprised none of the mandolin players I've asked lately. Unlike other instruments, the role of the small, eight-string instrument has not been spelled out as clearly by time and tradition. The association with Bill Monroe has encouraged the notion that the mandolin belongs only in bluegrass music.

However, the mandolin has been a part of what we now call old-time music for about a hundred and twenty years. In 1880 a mandolin craze began in America when a band called the Estudiantina Fígaro, also known as the Spanish Students, arrived in New York, played at the Booth Theater for four months, and then went on an extensive tour. They weren't actually playing mandolins but bandurrias; however, they were so wildly received that local groups began to imitate the Students using the instrument they were more familiar with.

Before long there were mandolin players, teachers, clubs, and "orchestras" in American towns and cities, in high schools, and on college campuses. Instrument manufacturers, most notably Lyon and Healy, began to build thousands of bowl back mandolins each year. Smartly-dressed young men and women joined mandolin clubs to play light classical pieces as well as popular tunes of the day, including ragtime music.

In fact, rags sounded so good on the bright and plucky mandolin that in 1902 Scott Joplin dedicated "The Entertainer" to a mandolin club. The very next year W. C. Handy heard a black string band playing the blues. As he wrote in his autobiography, he watched as three young men with "a battered guitar, a mandolin, and a worn-out bass" wowed the crowd, turning him on to the music



Matthew Spencer

detail of Bill Monroe publicity photo from WBT-Charlotte, courtesy North Carolina Folklife Institute, Charlotte Country Music Story Collection. Mandolin lady photo courtesty of Gail Gillespie. Pitch pipe box photo courtesy of Gary Silverstein.

1924 Victor supplement, courtesy Peter Honig

The Fiddlin' Powers Family. l-r: Charlie (banjo), Ada (ukulele), Orpha (mandolin), Carrie (guitar), and James Cowan Powers (fiddle).

courtesy North Carolina Folklife Institute, Charlotte Country Music Story Collection

The Tobacco Tags at WBT - Charlotte. l-r: George Wade (mandolin), Luke Baucum (mandolin), Edgar Reid Sumney (guitar), announcer Hubert Fincher.

that he would help popularize. In other words, the mandolin was there at crucial moments in the evolution of these two great forms of African-American music.

Like other instruments, mandolins reached the most isolated hollows in the South via mail-order catalogues such as Sears-Roebuck. No doubt people were soon picking and strumming them along with fiddles and banjos on many an Appalachian porch. The mandolin was played in some of the first performing and recording string bands. James Cowan Powers' daughter Orpha Lou played a bowl back for the Fiddlin' Powers Family of Russell County, Virginia. (On their recordings from the mid-1920s the mandolin is hard to distinguish, leading me to guess that Orpha Lou played rhythm.) Fiddler Clayton McMichen of Altoona, Georgia, had a mandolin player in his Home Town Boys String Band. Mandolin player R. O. Mosley's plaintive tremolo can be heard on the recordings of the Leake County Revelers, who came from around Sebastopol, Mississippi. Fiddlin' Doc Roberts had his son James play mandolin in the trio he formed about the same time. And George Wade and Luke Baucum played mandolins for the Three Tobacco Tags who were popular in and around the Carolinas and Virginia.

Early recordings of mandolins playing the melody on fiddle tunes include Ted Hawkins playing "Flop Eared Mule" with the Skillet Lickers in 1927, and Arthur McClain picking "Old Hen Cackle" from 1931. Both are included in the Document compilation, *Rags, Breakdowns, Stomps & Blues: Vintage Mandolin Music 1927-1946*, and that album name alone gives you an idea of the kinds of music that string bands thought suited the mandolin, and that mandolin players liked to pick. The collection contains three of the greatest black string band musicians--Coley Jones ("Dallas Rag"), Charlie McCoy ("Jackson Stomp"), and Howard Armstrong ("State Street Rag"). A listen to the Scottdale String Band's "Carbolic Rag," the Skillet Lickers' "Hawkins' Rag," or Phebel Wright's later "Lint Head Stomp," shows how much white musicians picked up from the black bands. All these tunes are popular with many old-time mandolin players today.

During the "revival" period of old-time music in the '60s and '70s, when the music began to spread beyond its home territories, the mandolin easily found a place. Bands of the period embraced the instrument, and many of the better-known groups had one.

The late Mike Seeger was a fine mandolin picker and liked to play such tunes as "Dallas Rag" with the pioneering New Lost City Ramblers. Also influential were the Hollow Rock String Band, with Bert Levy on mandolin. Levy's mandolin would twin with the fiddler on "Kitchen Girl" or "Over the Waterfall," tunes the band brought into wider circulation.

At almost the same time a California band coalesced around the energetic mandolin of Kenny Hall. They called themselves the Sweets Mill String Band. Kenny preferred a vintage bowl back instrument, and used his fingernail instead of a pick. Not only was Kenny's mandolin the driving force, but the band had a second mandolin player in Cary Lung, who added harmony and rhythm.

The Red Clay Ramblers have long featured mandolin, played in the band's earlier days by Jim Watson, and today by Clay Buckner. Their live album *Chuckin' the Frizz*, recorded in 1979, shows Watson as an excitingly aggressive player, whether playing strident rhythm or fast and exuberant lead. The Fuzzy Mountain String Band and the Any Old Time String Band, who didn't have a regular mandolin in the line-up, also liked to toss one into a tune now and then.

The Red Clay Ramblers. l-r: Jack Herrick (horn), Tommy Thompson (banjo), Clay Buckner (fiddle). Mike Craver, Jim Watson (mandolin).

Kenny Hall was an important player in the revival, and at 87 years old, he's still playing his regular gig in Fresno, California. Kenny first heard old-time music on 78 rpm records, and learned how to play fiddle and mandolin at the Berkeley School for the Blind. He worked in a broom factory while playing on radio with a band called the Happy Hayseeds, but virtually gave up music from the 1940s to the '60s, when he could find no one in the Oakland area to play with. "And then the hippies came along in the '60s," he told me on the phone, "and I wasn't alone anymore."

I asked Kenny why he used his fingernail instead of a pick like other mandolin players and he replied, "It's the easiest way to do it." Holding a pick, he asserted, "takes some of your strength away." He also claimed that a vintage bowl back mandolin simply had better tone than an instrument that was, say, only 80 years old.

"You just play the straight melody," Kenny said about his approach. "You don't try to fool around or improvise, oh no. Improvising is for jazz people." For rhythm he prefers open chords (rather than closed bluegrass-style "chop" chords), and he described for me the

Virginia Curtiss

Kenny Hall

Clyde Curley with his 1918 F4

rhythm he prefers: *Tickle-tackle, tickle-tackle, tickle-tackle.*

Being from an earlier generation, Kenny counts himself lucky to have had a new musical life begin during the revival. "It's something I didn't think would ever happen," he remembered. While older than the "hippies," he got along with them well. "Except I didn't like their ice cream," he told me. "They made it out of snow."

Clyde Curley's 1998 CD *Old Time Mandolin Music* with a band called the Oxymorons was the first recommended to me when I began to listen to the music a few years ago. How refreshing (at least for a mandolin player) to hear an old-time trio that had no fiddle but instead a mandolin playing melody.

Clyde is a retired high school teacher who lives in Bellingham, Washington. He credits the New Lost City Ramblers and Jody Stecher for getting him interested in mandolin back in his college days. Later he was inspired by the playing of Paul Kotapish when the two of them were members in the same band. "And Paul was playing a really beautiful [Gibson] F4. So I got to hear what a mandolin was capable of doing in old-time music."

He took a year off from teaching in order to produce the recording, and released it originally on cassette. Clyde first proposed the project to Joel Bernstein, a banjo and harmonica player who would become part of the band. "The first thing [Joel] said," Clyde recounted to me, "was, 'Why don't you play it on fiddle?'" But Clyde felt that there was little old-time mandolin available on record and he wanted to "help spread the gospel of the instrument."

Clyde is the first to admit that the heart of old-time music is often the fiddle and banjo. But as a fiddle player, he saw some

advantages in the less exalted instrument. "There's something about the tone of the mandolin that I think is extremely appealing, extremely beautiful, and there's the percussive nature of the instrument and the fact that you can control the microdynamics of the volume as well as the rhythms better and more comfortably than I would on the fiddle."

"The goal was to take the tradition of the fiddle tune and simply switch it over to the mandolin, and try to use the advantages of the instrument." Clyde turned "Billy in the Lowlands," "Abe's Retreat," "Grub Springs," and many others into pleasing mandolin tunes. He plays very cleanly and lightly, for the most part using single strings rather than double-stops or drones.

I asked Clyde about playing in jams. "What you want to do is tuck yourself in there behind the fiddle," he says. "You don't want to ride on top of the fiddle. There are some people who play loudly and have a jangle in their playing that can be quite irritating. [The mandolin player] needs to be listening and not bringing attention to himself. That takes somebody with a good ear and a lot sensitivity and skill."

The mandolin has the advantage of being both a melody and a rhythm instrument, and Clyde, like many players, likes to switch back and forth. "The kind of rhythm that my ear likes is roughly the kind produced by a banjo uke. Instead of just the offbeat chop I like a sort of *chicka-chicka-chicka* sound." This sounds similar to Kenny Hall except that Clyde doesn't like the "jangly" sound of open chords and so damps the strings.

A frequent musician at contra dances, Clyde has also done a service to mandolin players (and fiddlers) in publishing, with Sue Songer, two volumes of *The Portland Collection*, a spiral-bound compilation of hundreds of contra dance tunes in standard notation. The three companion CDs are not only useful but make for fine listening.

"I'm not sure why they brought me on, because I played the mandolin and so did Kenny," Cary Lung told me about his time with the Sweets Mill String Band. "But it was pretty life-changing for me." He began to take his reel-to-reel tape recorder to Kenny's place so he could record some of the enormous number of tunes that the older musician new. But Cary never learned to play them the way that Kenny did. "I have some friends here [in Seattle] who say that I don't know any tunes but I can play anything that they play. I think my approach to music, because I wasn't a proficient musician but I had a really good ear, was that I fashioned myself as a rhythm player and also sort of played around what everyone else was doing. I love to harmonize."

For a while Cary lived in Arizona, running a toyshop and not playing a lot of music. "For me music is really social. I need to feel really comfortable with the people that I play with and I never found that in Tucson. It took me moving to Seattle six years ago. It's an amazing challenge because there are so many really great players here. It just got all the juices flowing again for me. "

Fiddler Doug Yule wanted to form a trio and recruited Cary along with guitar and banjo player Tom Collicott. The band called themselves Red Dog, and recorded their first CD, *Hard Times*. While there are one or two up-tempo numbers such as "Come Back Boys, Let's Feed the Horses," most of the tunes are mid-tempo or slow. In some parts the guitar leads, elsewhere it's banjo or fiddle or Cary's mandolin, but always there is a weaving of sweet harmonies. "I'm basically playing around the fiddle," Cary explained. "I like to kick rhythm a little bit and find places to enhance the fiddle. I find harmonies and rhythms that help drive the tune. In terms of chords, I don't really play straight chords that much. Mostly it's two-string chords, or parallel melodies or parallel harmonies. A lot of time an octave separation. I'll rise above [the fiddle] or below, I'll weave back and forth. It's pretty easy for the mandolin to get lost in a larger group. In Red Dog I can hear myself. Doug and Tom make it easy to be subtle."

Cary's main mandolin, a 1914 Gibson A4, used to belong to Bert Levy of the Hollow Rock String Band. Just lately he has picked up two others, so that now he can do what mandolin players rarely attempt—play in alternative tunings just like the fiddlers do. It's a lot more trouble to retune an eight-string instrument, and it's easy to break one of those high strings, so mandolin players don't retune very often. But as a result they don't have those drone strings and can't duplicate the darker and more eerie tones that come out of their fiddle cousins. These days Cary gets a lot of ribbing when he walks into a jam with three cases under his arms. But he likes the sound he's hearing, and which he has used on a new CD that Red Dog is just completing.

Emily Buckhannon

Curtis and Dennis Buckhannon at the Whistle Stop Depot in Ferguson, Missouri.

The Monroe Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys, the Delmore Brothers, the Louvin Brothers—brother duets were known to make beautiful harmonies. Oftentimes the singers also played mandolin and guitar, the two instruments as matched as the voices, with the mandolin playing the intros, fills, and breaks. On recordings made with his brother Charlie, Bill Monroe's relatively simple mandolin embellishments, learned from players we would now call old-time, sound some of the beginnings of bluegrass.

Missourians Curtis and Dennis Buckhannon have played as a brother duet for years now, but unlike most brother duets, which are known for harmony singing, the Buckhannon Brothers are strictly an instrumental duo with lead mandolin and guitar rhythm. While they haven't traveled a lot, fortunately the brothers have recorded. Fiddle tunes like "Squirrel Hunters" and "Campbell's Farewell to Red Gap," mandolin tunes like "Dallas Rag" and "Vicksburg Stomp," and also Irish, Creole, and Mexican tunes, fill the self-produced *Old Time Jamboree* and two earlier CDs.

Curtis, the mandolinist, recalled for me a trip to the Appalachians when he was 17, when he first heard the instrument. He and Dennis were both playing guitar, but Curtis asked for a mandolin for his birthday and got a 1960s Japanese-made bowl back. (Several players I spoke to started on the same style of instrument.) "Trying to find recordings of mandolin was pretty hard back then. I stumbled across Kenny Hall and really latched onto what he was doing. And Bill Monroe. Then Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong. Then I got into Yank Rachel." Soon he discovered the New Lost City Ramblers, the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, and a ragtime group called the Etcetera String Band.

I was surprised how few of the tunes on the three Buckhannon Brothers CDs I recognized. Curtis said, "I don't like to do overworked standards a lot. There's so much good music out there. Some of them might be from local Missouri fiddlers, just played on the mandolin in my old style. I used to go down to New Mexico a lot and came across a recording of Mexican fiddler Cleo Ortiz. Always crooked in their timing, that lured me."

While a mandolin playing a fiddle tune can sometimes sound thin, Curtis' playing is always robust, full, and textured. He described his translation of a fiddle into a mandolin tune. "I like to use a lot of double stops, gives it a fuller sound. Where I feel tremolo would fit I try to blend it in as well as I can. Obviously in a waltz but even little spots, maybe for a sixteenth note, it just adds a little texture. I like to think of it as painting, different kinds of strokes. You don't want it to be flat and monotone, you want some guts

to it." Curtis also borrows from the banjo's rhythm, as well as the blues.

While you never hear Curtis playing rhythm on the CDs, I asked him about his rhythm playing in jams, as well as the band he and his brother have been playing in for years, Cousin Curtis and the Cash Rebates. "I like to change it up some and not do the same thing for the whole song. I'll do maybe a cross-picking style. I've been getting into a banjo sound, with triplets. You can add a seventh note to a chord for a really neat sound. Open chords sometimes. Sometimes I'll chop."

"It's an expressive instrument to play," Curtis says. "You can get very emotional with it. It can be happy or mournful. I try to get the most out of it I can."

The brother duet tradition is also carried on by a couple of brothers-in-spirit, Adam Tanner and Mark Jackson, who are the Twilite Broadcasters. California-raised Adam Tanner took Suzuki violin training as a child. Later he helped to found and then recorded and toured with an electronic/rock fusion band called Grotus, before deciding to unplug. "I heard the Fly By Night String Band, and they really had great mandolin on their stuff. And I heard older cuts. Doc Roberts played the mandolin and I was really excited about that. I also heard Ted Hawkins." Adam began attending festivals and jamming with some fine mandolin players such as Caleb Klauder and Greg Clark of Portland, Oregon. He moved to North Carolina, and learned from older fiddlers such as North Carolinian Joe Thompson and Kentuckian Clyde Davenport.

In 2003 Adam brought together some musicians under the name Adam Tanner and the Dirty Rag Mob, and recorded a CD called *Rare Rags and Stringband Blues*. Adam played mandolin on five of the tunes, including "Southern Blues," learned from a 1926 Scottdale String Band recording, "Hawkins' Rag," and a sunny "Georgia Camp Meeting" learned from the Leake County Revelers.

Adam and Mark formed the Twilite Broadcasters in 2008, and while they do like to play instrumentals, the two have concentrated on their harmony singing. In 2010 they self-produced the CD *Evening Shade,* in which the instrumentation is always tastefully in service to the voices on such songs as "More Pretty Girls Than One" and "Midnight Special."

"We often have to change the key," Adam said. "We can't sing as high as either the Louvin Brothers or the Monroe

Elizabeth Fritts

The Twilite Broadcasters, Adam Tanner (left) and Mark Jackson (right)

Carl Jones

Brothers. I transpose as many licks as I can. Some move around nicely but if it isn't working well, I'll modify it." He has borrowed some of Monroe's techniques. "Bill Monroe was really good at playing a fast tremolo, which he dropped later on. He wanted to fill up the space with a lot of sound because it was just the two of them."

Being a fiddler is Adam's starting point for playing fiddle tunes on the mandolin. "I've spent a lot of time working on my bowing and phrasing and also the use of drones and open strings and double-stops. So my mandolin approach is to try to emulate that . . . [including the] shuffles, just the way the fiddle tunes are phrased." But he also found that the mandolin could have its advantages. "I find a lot of really cool voicings on the mandolin, because you can play three-finger chords. You can really do a double-stop on the whole mandolin and it rings out." He sometimes works out melodies using chord shapes. "You can't do that on fiddle."

Up until now, my interviews for this article had all been conducted by phone. But by lucky coincidence one of my favorite old-time mandolin players, Carl Jones, was coming here to Toronto. He and his partner, fiddler Erynn Marshall, were coming up from Galax, Virginia, where Erynn is the concert coordinator for the Blue Ridge Music Center. Here to visit with Erynn's friends from her time living in this city, they also planned a house concert in the back-garden studio of a member of the local jamming scene.

I got a seat so close up front that I had to keep my legs from bumping into them. The evening was a casual delight, Erynn and Carl mixing tunes and songs, some old and some original, fiddle and guitar or fiddle and mandolin. Carl played some mandolin instrumentals, including "Running Through the Rain to Keep Your Hair Dry," and "Brown Button Shoes," which he learned from Norman Blake and James Bryan during the formative years when he played with them.

The next day I sat down with Carl. "I always gravitated to a more mellow tempo," he said of his move from playing bluegrass with the Mud Road String Band in Alabama, in his early college years. Through his friend James Bryan, the fiddler and tune collector, he became friends with Norman and Nancy Blake, and ended up touring with them in the Rising Fawn String Ensemble. Some of their intricate and multi-

Mike Melnyk

The Foghorn Trio: l-r, Caleb Klauder, Sammy Lind, Nadine Landry.

voiced instrumentals can be heard on *Natasha's Waltz,* which also features Larry Sledge and Peter Ostroushko.

"With those guys what I learned the most was dynamics," Carl said. "And just the aesthetics. And the personalities of each old instrument. They had a reverence for the music first of all, and for the originality of the renditions they would do. They felt a strong sense of self, what they brought through their instruments."

With singer, fiddler, and guitar player Beverly Smith, Carl made three recordings, most recently 2009's *Glow*. Carl plays mandolin on several of the songs and tunes, including the original instrumental "The Final Stretch," and a fiddle-mandolin duet on "Cluck Old Hen." Carl talked about his approach to fiddle tunes. "Of course, you've got the melody. And then you've got the chord progression. And the harmony. And there's four because then you've got 'anything goes'—the rambling territory. I try to shift. It gets you to really know your instrument."

"My big thing," he continued, "is two-string chords. Just small shapes. And they link up really great on the mandolin. Six magic shapes plus one—a little thing that I teach that works great. It's all the connectors, all the way up the neck. I love that. I also like to add the drone. If it's in G especially you can kind of use the clawhammer banjo technique, hitting the low G as a little filler note. That's old-timey-sounding to me."

Learning a new fiddle tune, Carl tries to hear it from a fiddler in order to pick up the nuances. "You think you've got it and then you go back to the original recording or fiddler and you think, Whoa. Your ears are not ready at the onset. Before you put the flesh on it, you have to have a skeleton. But the mandolin is a great, meandering, noodling instrument. On a song or a tune, just winding around. Just a tremolo note is beautiful. I like the melodic and pretty tunes, a nice, simple melody. Mandolins are perfect for that."

Originally called Foghorn Leghorn after the Warner Brothers cartoon character, the Foghorn String Band is certainly one of the best-known old-time bands featuring mandolin; and Caleb Klauder's mandolin playing has given the instrument a real boost in the old-time world. On their most recent CD, *Weiser Sunrise*, Caleb often employs a strong, galloping rhythm to help drive the band. On a fast tune such as "Kicking Up the Devil on a Holiday" he joins the fiddle player for the melody. In part because of the sound of his F5 mandolin, Caleb's playing has some of the force of a bluegrass musician's. Not usually given its own solo, his mandolin is instead an integral part of the Foghorn sound.

Alas, the Reeltime Travelers have been defunct for some time but they're still one

Matthew Spencer

Randy Johnson

of my favorites of the recent string bands who have had a mandolin in the mix. Thomas Sneed often stuck to rhythm playing, but he would also weave in and out of the fiddle and banjo parts, such as on the song "Bear Creek" on their last CD, *Livin' Reeltime, Thinkin' Old Time*. On the slow "Down by the River" he was more prominent, playing a simple and lovely melody. Sweeter and less hard-driving than the Foghorn String Band, the Travelers nevertheless had an equally integrated sound.

The Atlas Stringband from Seattle has been playing together for several years now. On their self-titled CD, David Parker's mandolin playing on a tune like "Jenny on the Railroad" often twins the fiddle on the melody, though he'll also throw in some sudden rhythm strums. Sometimes the mandolin stands out while at other times it joins with the fiddle or the fiddle and banjo. He uses quick, constant picking to complement the fiddle's long notes on a tune such as "Duck River." Even his tremolo on the waltz "Likes Liquor Better Than Me" is strong and woody.

On the Knuckle Knockers' self-titledCD, mandolinist Bill Foss trades off with the fiddle on "Shipping Port," taking over the high lead. Guitar and mandolin play a nice simple melody between the verses of "Little Black Train." Like some of the other string bands, the Knuckle Knockers let their mandolin player loose to play a rag, in this case the mid-tempo "Wildcat Rag."

"Drunkard's Hiccups" is a highlight on the Strung Out String Band's self-titled CD of 2009, and the mandolin rings out on three cuts of the Run of the Mill String Band's 2005 *Steal Aboard*, including a rag medley. The members of Wild Hog in the Woods have eclectic tastes, and John Donoghue, taking the place of a fiddler, puts a lot of swing into his mandolin. Philip Foster of Red Mountain is always part of that band's texture, even on a tune like "B Flat Rag," which some mandolin players would have wanted all for themselves.

Tom Mindte and Jeremy Stephens of Maryland discovered a shared love for the old brother-style duets at a campsite one summer. The result was *Old Time Duets*, a collection of songs and gospel numbers such as "Drifting Too Far from the Shore" and "Mansions for Me." There's no revisionist playing here, but only the good old sound. Mandolin player Mindte has great tone and a fine tremolo, and keeps his breaks simple and expressive.

The Carolina Jug Stompers, on their album *Rooster on a Limb*, hearken back to the black string bands of the '20s and the

white bands influenced by them. In the Gus Cannon song, "Money Never Runs Out," mandolin player Randy Johnson picks a rag-inflected melody behind the singer. On "Maybelle Rag" he picks a very fast melody, more notey than that played by the fiddler, showing that the two instruments don't have to do the same thing at the same time. There are a couple of tunes from the Mississippi Sheiks here too. This is cheerful stuff.

Devine's Jug Band brings a fine concatenation of instruments together, letting loose no fewer than three banjo-mandolin players on different cuts of their *Terrible Operation Blues*. "Dallas Rag" has two of them, Jacob Groopman and Tommy Marion, on lead and harmony. Bill Foss (who also plays with the Knuckle Knockers) picks "Donald Rag" at breakneck speed, and his "Jackson Stomp" is the fastest version of this Cow Cow Davenport tune that I've ever heard. Sometimes it feels like the band members are about to veer out of control and smash into something, but they always manage to hit the brakes in time and come to a dizzying stop.

The Northside Southpaws are a left-handed mandolin and guitar duet who play resonator instruments. Their *No Bread* has a couple of Scottdale String Band tunes, as well as one from the Mississippi Mud Steppers.

The mandolin band Ragtime Skedaddlers are re-creators of a delightful period of music that has all but died out. The early mandolin craze that spread the instrument across America coincided with the rise of ragtime (1890 to World War I). Reams of ragtime sheet music were published, often for the mandolin. Under the direction of lead banjo-mandolinist Dennis Pash, the band (Nick Robinson playing the second mandolin part on a 1920s Vega Cylinder Back, and Dave Krinkel on guitar) plays this happy, demanding contrapuntal music note-for-syncopated note, as in "Ma Ragtime Baby," "Whistling Rufus," and "A Tally Ho Party," on their self-titled album. The rags that became popular (and still are) with traditional musicians, such as "Ragtime Annie" and "Blackberry Rag," seem blessedly simple in comparison.

Finally, I will mention two players more recognized in the bluegrass than the old-time world. Known primarily as a fine Monroe-style bluegrass player, Skip Gorman has spent a good deal of time exploring the music of the old West. *Mandolin in the Cow Camp* is a two-CD set of mandolin tunes (sometimes solo, sometimes accompanied by guitar, frailing banjo, or another mandolin-family instrument) played on an inexpensive vintage flat-top mandolin. Everything from "Rye Whiskey" to "Goin' to Leave Old Texas Now" is here, 62 tunes in all.

And then there's Mike Compton. It's Mike's mandolin that can be heard playing "You Are My Sunshine" on the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, and "Wayfaring Stranger" on the *Cold Mountain* CD. (Yes, putting the mandolin into 1860s Appalachia was an anachronism.) Many will remember Mike's playing with the late John Hartford and the Hartford String Band, who made several Rounder CDs. But the one I want to mention is his recording with the younger mandolin player David Long, *Stomp*. Whether he's playing an old tune like "Sweet Lizzie," an ancient-sounding Monroe tune like "Evening Prayer Blues," or an original, Mike is a master of fiddle-shuffle-style mandolin—and David isn't far behind.

Old-time mandolin players today are both adhering to tradition and, paradoxically, finding new ways to sound old on that small, eight-stringed instrument. Mandolin players tend to hold to the "big tent" notion of old-time music (according to Paul Lucas, proprietor of the website oldtimemandolin.com). Rags, blues, stomps, and fiddle tunes—to many mandolin players, it's all old-time.

Cary Fagan is a writer in Toronto who can be reached at www.caryfagan.com. His most recent kids' novel, Banjo of Destiny, *is about a boy who builds his own banjo. Many of the recordings mentioned in this article (and other recordings by the same bands and musicians) can be ordered or downloaded from amazon.com, itunes, cdbaby, and often (sometimes only) from the bands' or musicians' own websites.*