



BLUEGRASS MUSIC: A TRULY AMERICAN STORY

Art Form: Music

Style: Bluegrass

Culture: American

Technical Needs

- two microphones on stands

Meet the Artist

Keith Baumann and THE HARD TIMES BLUEGRASS BAND is made up of professional musicians, each with over 20 years of performing and teaching experience. They have entertained at major festivals, showcases, and concert halls throughout the United States. Baumann is a master dobro and mandolin player who teaches various instruments and styles, including bluegrass and swing. He and the other band members have toured nationally and performed numerous successful bluegrass music programs for schools and community organizations around the country.

About the Performance

The main goal of the program is to introduce the audience to traditional bluegrass music and present vital information about its roots, structure, instrumentation and historical significance. The presenters will utilize musical performance, visual demonstration and spoken word to create an entertaining and educational show.

Each presentation begins with the performance of an up-tempo bluegrass number featuring both vocal harmony-singing as well as instrumental solos. Next, the artists will deliver a brief description of the music's Scottish and Irish roots and utilize musical examples whenever possible. The program continues with demonstrations showing the evolution of the bluegrass sound popularized by Bill Monroe and His Bluegrass Boys in the 1940's.

Contextual Information

Bluegrass music is one of the few truly American musical art forms and its heart felt songs tell the tale of America's rich history. With lyrics that focus on family, work, religion, and the joys and sorrows of day-to-day life, bluegrass is without a doubt one of our national treasures.

The origins of today's bluegrass music can be traced back centuries to old Scottish and Irish melodies brought over to this country by immigrants who settled in the Appalachian Mountain region of the Southern United States. Traditional fiddle tunes were soon combined with other acoustic instruments from the region such as banjo, guitar, and mandolin to form small string bands that entertained at family gatherings, community socials, and church functions.

The invention of the phonograph and the onset of radio in the early 1900's brought this music out of the rural south to audiences throughout the United States. In addition, the Depression of the 1930's found many Southerners migrating north to big cities in search of factory work bringing their unique brand of American music with them.

The term "bluegrass" was first used in conjunction with a band led by Bill Monroe, a mandolin player and singer from Rosine, Kentucky who formed a group called "Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys" in the late 1930's. Bill Monroe revolutionized country music by combining guitar, banjo, mandolin, fiddle, and bass with a hard driving rhythm, featuring instrumental soloing and powerful vocal harmonies. This band is considered by most experts to be the blueprint for the musical style that has since come to be called "bluegrass" and earning Monroe the title of the "Father of Bluegrass Music."

Vocabulary

Country Music: In the early 1600's, the early settlers spread to the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Kentucky; stories reflecting daily life were put into song, then passed along at social gatherings. Since most of these people lived in rural mountain areas, this music was called "mountain" or "country" music.

Bluegrass music: An outgrowth of country music. This new form began with Bill Monroe, who was from Kentucky, "the Bluegrass state." His band, which he called the Bluegrass Boys, became the foundation for a new musical form known as bluegrass music. They first appeared on the Grand Ole Opry in 1939. By 1945, his band included Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, who later launched their own band, The Foggy Mountain Boys.

- Rhythm:** The arrangement of beats in music to form patterns.
- Tempo:** Rate or speed of the music. Slow, fast, etc.
- Pitch:** Names of the various tones in the musical scale.
- Melody:** Arrangement of notes to produce a main line in a song.
- Unison:** Singing or playing identical tones together.
- Harmony:** Voices or instruments performing complimentary melodic lines higher or lower than the main melody.
- Acoustic instruments:** Played without amplifiers or other means of electrification.

BLUEGRASS INSTRUMENTS

- Guitar:** Six strings with fretted neck; shaped somewhat like a violin but has a 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.
- Dobro:** Six strings; also known as the resonophonic guitar; predecessor to modern steel guitar; played with instrument laying flat and 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.