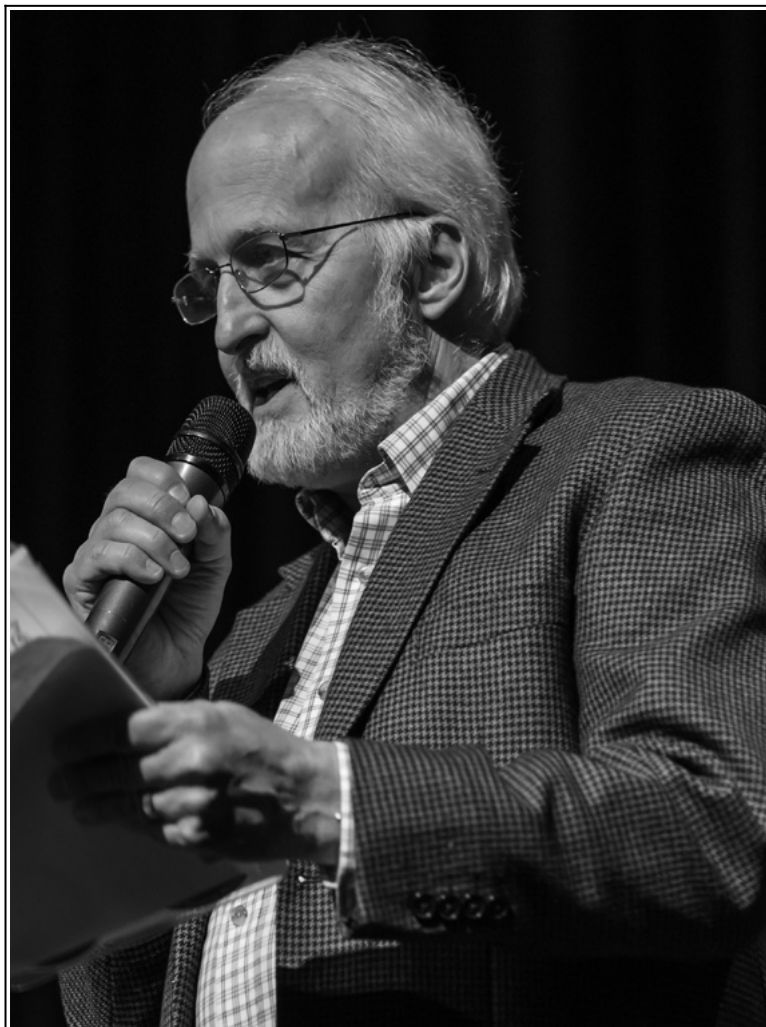


40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
JOE VAL  
BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL



PRESENTED BY  
THE BOSTON BLUEGRASS UNION



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*(Photo by Dave Hollender)*

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## Welcome Message

Community: it helps us get through the lowest of lows, and makes the highest highs even sweeter when we share them together. It is the single greatest thing bluegrass has going for it, and we are all so lucky to be in it together.

It's difficult to imagine a starker contrast than what surrounds this year's 40th Joe Val Bluegrass Festival. The tragic loss of Gabe Hirshfeld has left our community reeling, and a void in our hearts that we will always share. We are humbled by what Gabe brought to this music and our community, and we are all better off for his too-brief time here.

And still, we have so much to celebrate, and we have our community to celebrate with. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the BBU and the 100th anniversary of Joe Val's birth. It is our first festival in six years, and our first without our founding President, Stan Zdonik, who retired from the BBU Board after nearly 50 years of extraordinary service. Stan was the BBU's first President and served in that role for most of the organization's history. He also served as Board President of the International Bluegrass Music Association, and was later honored with IBMA's Distinguished Achievement Award.

In recognition of Stan's legacy, the BBU's Heritage Awards – honoring those who have made extraordinary contributions to bluegrass in Boston and throughout the Northeast – are being renamed this year as the Joe Val Artist Heritage Award and the Stan Zdonik Industry Heritage Award. We are deeply grateful for all Stan has done for our community, and we hope that renaming this award will help cement his legacy for generations to come.

We are proud to announce that the inaugural recipient of the Stan Zdonik Industry Heritage

Award is Stan himself, and that the Joe Val Artist Heritage Award will be presented to my father, Steve Watt. My dad is my favorite bluegrass musician in the entire world, and has been since before I was born. He is also the longtime leader of the Third Set Jam at Bluegrass Tuesdays, where he helped train countless young musicians – including many Berklee students who have gone on to become famous in bluegrass.

And finally, speaking of Berklee students and the future of our music, we are profoundly grateful to the Hirshfeld family for helping us celebrate Gabe's legacy – both at Joe Val and through the establishment of The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund (see page 6). Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the fund, whose mission is to support the musical education and development of young banjo players while preserving and advancing the community that defined Gabe Hirshfeld's life and work.

To our community: we love you, and we thank you for being here with us again!

Sincerely, Tony Watt (BBU President)

## Festival Information

The Joe Val Bluegrass Festival began in 1985 as a benefit concert to help Joe defer costs brought on by an unexpected illness. Shortly after this event, Joe sadly passed on. While bluegrass music lost a great friend, the Joe Val Bluegrass Festival was established as an annual tribute to this fine individual, whose warm heart and powerful high tenor voice won the love and respect of his fellow musicians and fans. This year's festival features an exciting lineup of national and regional bands, very special reunion sets and is packed with fine workshops, education programs, and as usual, picking around the clock.

### **Thanks to this years festivals organizers**

The Joe Val Bluegrass Festival is organized by the Board Members of the BBU: Allen Wiegner, BB Bowness, Chris Reckling, Gail Wiegner, Gerry Katz, Gretchen Bowder, Jim McDonough, Mark Therieau, Nancy Harrowitz, Natalie Jenson, Sumner Blount, Tim Parke and Tony Watt.

Additional thanks to Stephanie Stillman, Sheila Selby, Diane Shetler, Reuben Shetler, Joe Deetz, All Right Mailing And Printing and the entire bluegrass community.

### **BBU Information and Merchandise Table**

Be sure to visit the Joe Val/BBU merchandise sales table at the back of the ballroom. There's lots to see and buy. The table closes 15 minutes after the end of the last set of the evening. We have Joe Val 2026 t-shirts featuring this year's collectible design. The 2026 logo was designed by Marla Singleton. You can purchase many items including stickers, bucket hats and our BBU Yard Sale chockfull of those pre-owned CDs/LPs. You can renew your BBU membership and non-members can sign up.

### **Festival Rules**

1. Please keep talking to a minimum in the Main Stage area. Respect those that are here to listen to the music.
2. Valid wristbands are required for ALL festival activities, including workshops, Showcase Stage, and picking on all hotel floors and in the lobby. Keep wristbands visible at all times.
3. Remember the bluegrass festival rule: If your seat is in a seat, it's your seat. No seat saving allowed. If you leave the venue for any length of time, take your belongings so that others may share the music.
4. Video taping is not allowed in the Main Stage area.

5. The hotel is a non-smoking environment. Smoking is not permitted anywhere in the building.

6. Local liquor laws prohibit consumption or presence of personal alcoholic beverages in the festival public spaces.

7. While the Renaissance is a pet friendly hotel, due to audience size, no pets in the public spaces during the weekend.

8. Please turn off cell phones (or set on vibrate) as a courtesy to artists and patrons.

### **Biography of Joe Val**

Joe Valiante (shortened by Tex Logan in the 1950's to Joe Val) was born in Framingham, MA in 1926. After moving to Somerville, Joe began making music at the age of fourteen when his grandmother gave him a guitar. In the early '60s Joe joined forces with Bill Keith and Jim Rooney per- forming at the Club 47, sitting in with the Lilly Brothers at the Hillbilly Ranch, and then playing with the Charles River Valley Boys, releasing two albums, including the landmark "Beatle Country." Joe formed the New England Bluegrass Boys in the late '60s and recorded numerous albums. We are fortunate to have a wealth of Joe's recorded material available. Beyond being a wonderful performer, Joe was a mentor and friend to many in the music community. The Boston Bluegrass Union takes great pride in honoring Joe Val's legacy with this annual festival.

### **BBU Archives**

In 2026, the Boston Bluegrass Union will celebrate its 50th anniversary - a half a century of presenting and nurturing bluegrass music in the Greater Boston area. The BBU was formed in 1976, holding its first concert on October 3 featuring Joe Val and the New England Bluegrass Boys. It incorporated as a non-profit

on April 25, 1977. We've produced hundreds of concerts, festivals, educational programs and other events in the decades since.

The BBU has many documents and ephemera from its 50 years in existence, generously preserved and digitized by board member Gerry Katz. In addition, author Bill Nowlin has written a long format article on the history of the BBU for its 50th anniversary in 2026.

Don't miss a selection of the BBU archives, curated by Gerry Katz, on display in the Ballroom Lobby and Workshop area.

Visit the BBU archive at:  
<https://bbu.org/about/archives>  
Or use the QR code below:



### **Instrument Check Room**

Festival patrons may check instruments for free in the Dynasty A and B rooms located on the lower level of the hotel. Instruments must be in a case with an ID tag, and owners must provide contact information. Please note new hours for 2026: Friday 12pm-1pm and 4pm-11:15pm, Saturday 9:15am-11:15pm and Sunday 9:15am-6pm. Closing time is approximately 1/2 hour after the Main Stage closes. Please claim your instruments before closing; they cannot be retrieved when the rooms are locked for the night. At the end of the festival, unclaimed instruments will be turned over to the hotels lost and found. The BBU provides this service as a convenience and staffs rooms with volunteers. Using the service means you agree with the Terms of Use and assume all risk of loss. Neither the BBU nor the Renaissance is responsible for any theft, damage or other loss.

### **BBU Workshops**

Our festival has a reputation for producing great workshops. This year, we offer scores of sessions with masters from the Main Stage, workshops with regional instructors and insightful sessions with industry leaders. There's so much to choose from, you'll have to plan your time carefully! See the enclosed insert pages for the fully updated schedule.

### **Twenty-four Hour Picking**

We continue the tradition of twenty-four hour picking sessions. Join fellow pickers at all hours for camaraderie and great music on the lower level of the hotel.


### **Bluegrass Academy for Kids**

The BBU works hard to keep the legacy and tradition of bluegrass music alive through our annual Joe Val Bluegrass Academy for Kids. This popular program offers two days of professional instruction during the festival for children aged six to seventeen. Participants need to bring some basic skills in their instrument and a willingness to learn more. To cap off the weekend and showcase their skills, the students will perform a short concert on the Main Stage on Sunday at noon.

The Joe Val Kid's Academy meets in the Heritage Room (formerly Concord) beginning at 6pm on Friday evening. A dedicated BBU instructional staff devotes an entire festival weekend to ensure that bluegrass is passed down to the next generation. Be sure to let any young friends you know to sign up for next year's Joe Val 2027.

### **The Joe Val Wind-Up Hoe-Down**

A Sunday night dance party with the Beantown Buckaroos will kick off with a Texas Two-Step Lesson from Roger Weiss at 6.30pm Sunday night (band starts at 7pm, Sovereign Room)



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## Yoga

Kick your festival day off right with a yoga session led by Curly and Marcia. It's a great way to unwind and sharpen your focus. All ages and abilities are welcome!

Dress comfortably and bring your yoga mat (a few extra mats are available for loan—first come, first serve.)

Friday, Saturday & Sunday 8:30-9:30AM  
Chamberlain Room (lower level)

## Joe Val Schedule App

Bookmark the Joe Val Schedule App for mobile access to sessions and concerts! Create your own schedule and more.



## The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund

The entire bluegrass community is mourning the tragic loss of Gabe Hirshfeld. At the Boston Bluegrass Union, this loss feels especially personal since we quite literally watched Gabe grow up before our eyes. Gabe Hirshfeld was more than a gifted musician; he was the heart of the Boston bluegrass community. A bright presence defined by warmth, generosity, and an extraordinary spirit, Gabe had a rare gift for making everyone - from fellow virtuosos to first-time pickers feel seen, heard, and welcome. Whether through his masterful banjo playing, his humor, or his quiet kindness, he embodied the very best of the community he loved.

The loss of Gabe has left an immeasurable void. To ensure his passion for music and his spirit of generosity continue to ripple outward, the Boston Bluegrass Union, in partnership with the Hirshfeld family, has established The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund.

The Mission: *The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund will support the musical education and*

*development of young banjo players while preserving and advancing the community that defined Gabe Hirshfeld's life and work.*

We invite you to honor and further Gabe's legacy with a tax-deductible donation at the link: <https://bbu.wildapricot.org/> Or use the QR code below:



Photo by Jennie L. Scott

Your generous donation to The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund is tax-deductible. The Boston Bluegrass Union is a registered 501(c)(3) public charity (Tax Exempt ID: 22-2779696).

If you would prefer to contribute by mail, you can send a check made out to the Boston Bluegrass Union with "The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund" in the memo line to:

Boston Bluegrass Union  
PO Box 650061  
West Newton, MA 02465-0061

## Silent Auction to Benefit Hirshfeld Fund

The BBU is holding a silent auction of two instruments to benefit The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund. One is a Martin HD-28 guitar (\$3699 value) donated by The Music Emporium. The other is a Gold Tone OB-Grandee banjo (\$3299 value), which Gabe





actually had a hand in designing. All proceeds go directly to the fund. The auction ends on Sunday, Feb 15 at 3:00 pm and winners will be announced on the main stage.

Check out the instruments in the back of the ballroom and good luck! To bid use the QR code below:



## Heritage Awards

The BBU's Heritage Awards are awarded to those who have made extraordinary contributions to bluegrass in Boston and throughout the Northeast. Previous award winners include The Lilly Brothers, Don Stover, Bill Keith and Jim Rooney, and the founders of Rounder Records – Ken Irwin, Marian Leighton Levy, and Bill Nowlin.

Typically, two awards have been presented each year: one to a musician or band, and another to an industry leader. Beginning this year, these honors are being renamed the Joe Val Artist Award and the Stan Zdonik Industry Award. We're proud to announce that the inaugural recipient of the Stan Zdonik Industry Award is Stan himself, while the Joe Val Artist Award will be presented to Steve Watt.

### **Stan Zdonik Industry Award Winner: Stan Zdonik**

Stan recently transitioned off the BBU's Board of Directors, and as part of this change, the BBU wishes to recognize his extraordinary contributions to the organization and to the bluegrass community over the past 50 years. Stan was a founding member and the first President of the Boston Bluegrass Union, a role he held for most of the organization's history. In 1976, he was part of the small group of volunteers who brought the BBU into being,

serving not only as President but also as emcee and talent buyer. Over the decades, he led the organization through countless concerts, and the events that eventually evolved into today's Joe Val Bluegrass Festival – named the IBMA Event of the Year in 2006.

Beyond Boston, Stan's leadership shaped bluegrass on a national scale. He served on the International Bluegrass Music Association's Board of Directors as Vice Chair (2007–2010) and Chair (2010–

2013), guiding the organization through one of its most challenging periods during the Great Recession. As IBMA Board Chair, he helped negotiate the landmark move of the World of



Photo by Dave Hollender

Bluegrass from Nashville to Raleigh. In recognition of his decades of service to bluegrass music, Stan was later awarded IBMA's Distinguished Achievement Award – the second-highest honor the organization bestows, surpassed only by induction into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame.

In 2025, Stan also retired from his academic career at Brown University, where he had taught since 1983. After earning five degrees at MIT, culminating in a PhD in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Stan built a distinguished career focused on Database Management Systems. At his retirement, one colleague summed him up perfectly: "He's brilliant at brainstorming, but what's special is the enjoyment and life energy he gets out of thinking on his feet."



As the BBU Board has prepared to host its first Joe Val Bluegrass Festival in six years, we are reminded at every turn of the many ways Stan helped shape, sustain, and steward this beloved event. The BBU is profoundly grateful for all that outgoing President Stan Zdonik has done for our organization and for the broader bluegrass community. Incoming BBU President Tony Watt shared:

“It’s my great honor to join with all the members of the BBU Board in carrying Stan’s legacy forward at Joe Val and beyond. We couldn’t be more grateful for all Stan has done for our community, and we hope that renaming this award in his honor will help cement his legacy for generations to come.”

**Joe Val Artist Award Winner:  
Steve Watt**

The recipient of this year’s Joe Val Artist Award is Steve Watt, the long-time leader of the Third Set Jam at Bluegrass Tuesdays, and the father of BBU President Tony Watt. Steve started playing bluegrass in his early teens while growing up in New York City in the late 1950s. He moved to Boston in 1967, in part because of the bluegrass scene in the city. Once in Boston, he started going to the Hillbilly Ranch, where he got to hear - and later sit in with - the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover.

Steve was a founding member of the BBU who ran sound for the early concerts at the “big brown church with the rooster on top”. He formed and played in various bands through the years, and eventually co-founded his current band, True Life Bluegrass, to play at the Joe Val Benefit, a fundraiser held shortly before Joe passed away in 1985.



Photo by Joseph Watt

Steve and his bandmate in True Life Bluegrass, Eric Levenson, became fixtures at the weekly Tuesday night bluegrass sessions at The Cantab Lounge. At The Cantab, and later at Lily P’s, Steve helped train countless young musicians, including many Berklee students who went on to become famous in bluegrass. Tony shared this reflection on his father’s legacy:

“My Dad is my favorite bluegrass musician in the entire world, and has been since before I was born. But more than that, he is also one of the most beautiful people I’ve ever met, who loves and supports those around him unconditionally. On behalf of my entire family, I want to thank the BBU for honoring my Dad for his many decades of contributions to the bluegrass community in Boston and beyond.”

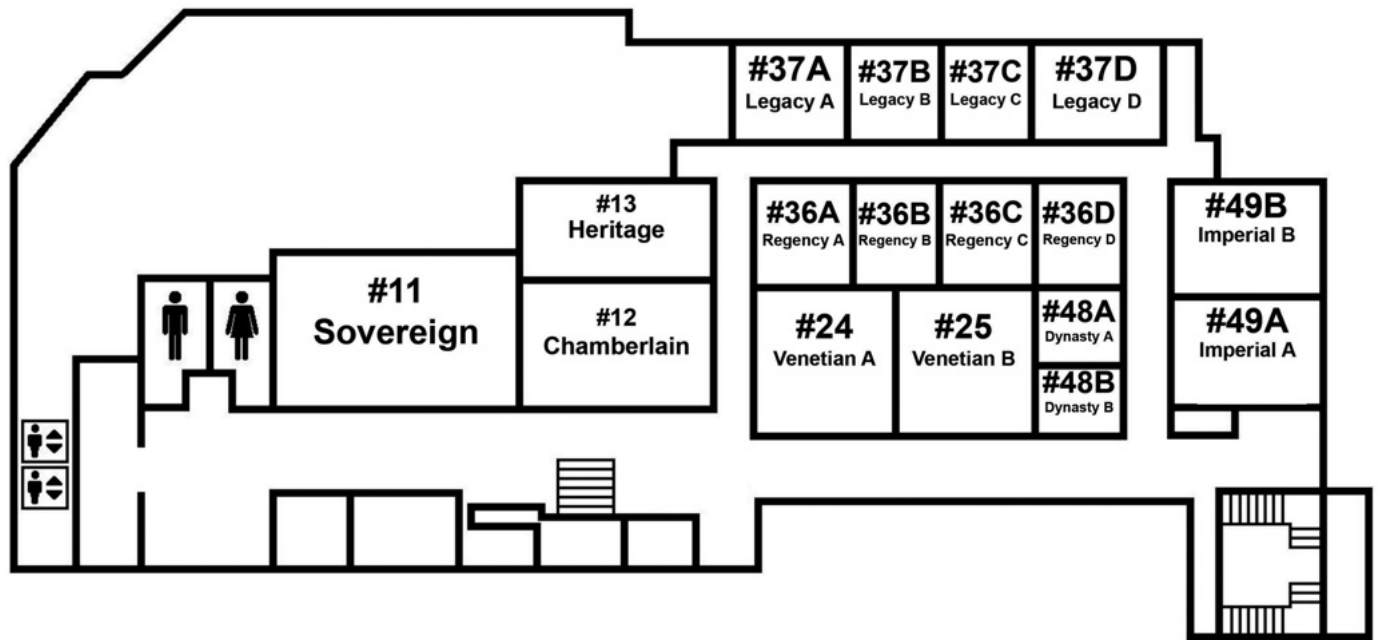
For more information about the Joe Val Bluegrass Festival, Joe Val himself, and the newly renamed Joe Val Artist and Stan Zdonik Industry Heritage Awards, please visit [BBU.org](http://BBU.org)

**Joe Val Schedule App**

Bookmark the Joe Val Schedule App for mobile access to sessions and concerts! Create your own schedule and more.



# Hotel Map – lower level



Watch for BMAM anniversary events on our website and social media accounts.

*It's a year of celebration!*

BMAM congratulates the  
Boston Bluegrass Union on their 50th Anniversary and the  
epic return of the 40th Anniversary Joe Val Bluegrass Festival!

[www.MaineBluegrass.org](http://www.MaineBluegrass.org)

## Main Stage Schedule

### Friday, Feb 13

6 PM - Berklee Bluegrass Band  
7 PM - The Joe Val All-Stars  
8 PM - Danny Paisley & The Southern Grass  
9:30 PM - Lonely Heartstring Band

### Saturday, Feb 14

11 AM - The Hosmer Mountain Boys  
12 PM - The Hazel Project  
1 PM - Joe Sings Joe  
2 PM - Tex's Troubadours  
3 PM - Rock Hearts  
4 PM - Special Consensus  
5 PM – Joe Val Artist Award: Steve Watt  
5:10 PM - Ashley Lilly & The Songcatchers  
6 PM - Northern Lights  
7 PM - The Hazel Project w/ Alice Gerrard  
8 PM – Stan Zdonik Industry Award: Stan Zdonik  
8:15 PM - Special Consensus  
9:15 PM - The Gibson Brothers

### Sunday, Feb 15

10 AM - The Reunion Band  
11 AM - Southern Rail  
12 PM - Kids' Academy  
12:30 PM - Rock Hearts  
1:30 PM - Mile Twelve  
2:10 PM - East Nash Grass  
3:55 PM - BBU 50<sup>th</sup> celebration  
4 PM - The Del McCoury Band

## Main Stage Band Biographies

### The Del McCoury Band

Del McCoury is a living link between bluegrass's earliest roots and its vibrant present. From honky-tonks and the Grand Ole Opry to sold-out festivals and viral moments, McCoury's influence spans generations. A York County, PA native, Del honed his craft under bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe, who shaped him into a master guitarist and lead singer. Now leading The Del McCoury Band alongside sons Ronnie and Rob, he remains a peerless torchbearer for bluegrass tradition—respected by legends, embraced by new fans, and driven by a lifelong commitment to doing what comes naturally.

### Alice Gerrard

In a career spanning more than 50 years, Alice has known, learned from, and performed with many of the old-time and bluegrass greats and has in turn earned worldwide respect for her own important contributions to the music. Known for her groundbreaking collaboration with Appalachian singer Hazel Dickens during the 1960s and '70s, the duo produced four classic Hazel and Alice LPs on Rounder and Smithsonian Folkways that influenced scores of young women singers. A tireless advocate of traditional music, Alice has won numerous honors, IBMA Distinguished Achievement Award, a Virginia Arts Commission Award, the North Carolina Folklore Society's Tommy Jarrell Award, and an Indy Award. In 2017 Alice was inducted into the IBMA Hall of Fame. Fresh from the release of her new book "Custom Made Woman: A Life in Traditional Music." Joe Val is honored to have Alice share her wonderful voice and stories at the 2026 festival.

### **The Gibson Brothers**

Based in upstate New York, Eric and Leigh Gibson have been playing and singing their special brand of brother duet and bluegrass music since 1983. In 2013, The Gibson Brothers won entertainer of the year for a second straight year at the IBMA Awards as well as three other group and individual trophies. Their latest album, *The Darkest Hour*, produced by Grammy award winning dobro player, Jerry Douglas, features their finest songs from the last 20 years handpicked by Douglas. Both Eric and Leigh are phenomenal song writers and performers and clear crowd favorites.

### **Danny Paisley & The Southern Grass**

Danny Paisley & The Southern Grass play powerful, unadorned, and intense traditional bluegrass. Danny's lead vocals will captivate your senses, so much so that many prominent musicians, including Alison Krauss consider Danny one of their favorite singers. Since Danny's father, Bob Paisley (founder of The Southern Grass), passed away in 2004, the band has made their niche in the bluegrass world, producing consecutive chart-topping albums. In 2024, Danny Paisley won his fourth IBMA Male Vocalist of the Year - an achievement bestowed only to three others in the history of bluegrass music.

### **Special Consensus**

Special Consensus, marking its 50th anniversary in 2025, continues to deliver a vibrant contemporary bluegrass sound deeply rooted in tradition. The band released a brand-new album, *Been All Around This World*, on the Nashville-based Compass Records label in June, 2025. Led by founder Greg Cahill, a recipient of the prestigious International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) Distinguished Achievement Award, Special

Consensus has been a cornerstone of the bluegrass community for five decades. The group has released 22 acclaimed recordings, earned eight IBMA awards, and received two Grammy nominations – a testament to their enduring artistry and innovation.

### **East Nash Grass**

East Nash Grass exemplifies the best of what bluegrass has to offer - as being named the 2024 IBMA New Artist of the Year would suggest. But their breathtaking talent as singers, instrumentalists, and composers is just the beginning. With a lifetime of experience in both new and legacy acts (Dan Tyminski, Tim O'Brien, Sierra Hull, Rhonda Vincent, etc.), the tradition of bluegrass is fundamental to who they are as musicians and performers. Yet it's their irreverent, adventurous, and audacious tendencies as next-gen performers that light a fire under audiences. "They are clearly one of the most entertaining bluegrass bands anywhere!" - Paul Schiminger, former IBMA Executive Director.

### **The Joe Val All-Stars**

The Joe Val All-Stars are Alison Brown on banjo (multiple GRAMMY and IBMA award winner), Stuart Duncan on fiddle (multiple GRAMMY, Academy of Country Music, and IBMA awards), Missy Raines on bass (10-time IBMA Bass Player of the Year), Matt Flinner on mandolin (Phillips, Grier and Flinner, two-time Winfield winner) and Michael Daves on guitar (Tony Trischka, Chris Thile, GRAMMY nominated). This will be a chance to hear some of the best musicians in the world play together for the very first time. Don't miss it!

### **Lonely Heartstring Band**

The Lonely Heartstring Band was born in Boston as a wedding band, hired for one wedding to play only Beatles repertoire on

traditional bluegrass instruments. They went on to win the 2013 Thomas Point Beach Festival Band Competition, 2015 IBMA Momentum Award and released two full length albums on Rounder Records. Known and loved for their ability to charm the hearts of the bluegrass community with their tight three part harmonies, poignant songs, dazzling instrumental prowess and good humor. In this reunion set, they'll be paying tribute to their late, beloved banjo player, Gabe Hirshfeld.

### **Mile Twelve**

Mile Twelve has been on a swift rise since the band's formation in Boston in late 2014, where three of the five members studied at the prestigious Berklee College of Music. They have performed extensively across the USA, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and Australia, recording three full length albums and winning several IBMA awards including the 2017 Momentum Award and 2020 New Artist of the Year. "Five accomplished bluegrass musicians who write, sing, and play like the wind - serious players who have serious fun." Tim O'Brien

### **Northern Lights**

We are very excited to welcome a very special reunion of Northern Lights! This Boston-based band formed in 1975 and took their progressive sound all over the Northeast and beyond. The line-up will feature longtime stalwarts of the band, including Taylor Armerding (mandolin), Bill Henry (guitar), and Jeff Horton (bass) and Dave Dick (banjo). The band issued ten studio recordings and one live recording with Vassar Clements. The band fuses an eclectic mix of traditional roots music, rock, country, soul and gospel with the high, lonesome vocal sound and instruments of bluegrass.

### **Ashley Lilly & The Songcatchers**

The Songcatchers are a multi-generational band with Ashley Lilly singing lead and Bill

Atkinson singing baritone. The Songcatchers feature close harmonies on both traditional and modern bluegrass and country songs. They also include original songs written by Ashley. The group has performed at venues including the Song of the Mountains in Marion, VA, East Tennessee State University, and Mountain Stage. Performing with the Songcatchers on the Joe Val Festival will include BB Bowness on banjo, Dan Boner on guitar and vocals, Eric Levenson on bass, and Laura Orshaw on fiddle.

### **Laura Orshaw (Artist-In-Residence)**

A respected powerhouse on the bluegrass scene, Orshaw was the first female to win SPBGMA Fiddle Player of the Year and prides herself on keeping the sounds of traditional bluegrass alive in the genre. With her sophomore solo project set to be released in 2026, Orshaw is already a seasoned performer, having toured throughout the world opening and sharing the stage with artists such as Del McCoury, Ricky Skaggs, John Scofield, Jim Lauderdale, Old Crow Medicine Show, Becky Buller, and Darol Anger among others. Orshaw has celebrated a successful career as a member of the GRAMMY nominated Po' Ramblin' Boys and a two-time IBMA award winner (2020 Gospel Recorded Performance of the Year and 2020 Collaborative Recording of the Year).

### **The Hazel Project**

The Hazel Project pays tribute to the music written or recorded by bluegrass pioneers and legendary musicians, Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard. Hazel and Alice tackled subjects from social injustice to the hardships of workers, as well as love and loss. With Betsy Green (fiddle), Gretchen Bowder (banjo), Whitney Roy (guitar), and Lindsay Lassonde (bass), The Hazel Project features sweet soaring

harmonies and tasteful tunes – traditional grassroots music to fill your heart and soul.

### **Rock Hearts**

Formed in 2013, Rock Hearts brings together five seasoned musicians from Southern New England who love to sing and pick bluegrass, old country tunes, and seek out tunes from other genres to “bluegrass-ify.” The band consists of founding member and banjo player, Joe Deetz, lead man and guitar/vocals, Alex MacLeod, the newest Kentucky Mandolin endorsed artist, Billy Thibodeau, bassist, Rick Brodsky, and fiddler/2023 IBMA Mentor of the Year nominee, Austin Scelzo. They were named an Official 2021 IBMA Showcase Band. Their 3rd album “Unfinished Bridges” is experiencing tremendous success with the album debuting in the Top 10 on national charts.

### **Southern Rail**

Southern Rail's performances are high-energy exuberant fun, with riveting harmonies, irrepressible humor and sparkling banjo, mandolin, and guitar solo work. They celebrate more than four decades of performing together, creating 13 recordings on several record labels including Turquoise and Pinecastle records. Their 1995 bluegrass Gospel compilation entitled “Glory Train” was a finalist for IBMA's Gospel Recording of the Year award. The group has toured extensively, and over the years they've taken their music to 26 US states and Canadian provinces to great acclaim. As the Boston Herald says, “First rate bluegrass... precise harmonies, sharp instrumental work... soaring and lush.”

### **The Reunion Band**

Known for its tight vocal harmonies and solid traditional bluegrass sound, The Reunion Band features veteran Boston-area musicians Richard Brown (mandolin), Dave Dillon (rhythm

guitar), Margaret Gerteis (acoustic bass), BB Bowness (banjo) and Laura Orshaw (fiddle). The band, which has been around since 2002, takes its name from the fact that its members have played together off and on and in various configurations for over 30 years.

### **Joe Sings Joe**

Joe Sings Joe is a traditional Bluegrass show featuring the songs that Joe Val and the New England Bluegrass Boys performed. The band has been featured at the Joe Val Festival as a tribute to the legacy of Joe Val. The lineup features Joe Singleton on lead, tenor and high baritone vocals along side three NEBB alumni including Dave Dillon on guitar and vocals, Eric Levenson on bass, and Joe Deetz on banjo and vocals. Plus John Roc on mandolin, Laura Orshaw on fiddle, and special guest Rich Stillman on banjo. Joe Val holds a special place in our hearts and it is an honor to pay tribute to his memory.

### **Tex's Troubadours**

Tex's Troubadours is a New England-based, five piece traditional bluegrass band. Led by guitarist Dave “Tex” Orlomoski, the band draws inspiration from pioneers such as Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs, Reno & Smiley and The Lilly Brothers. The band features Dave Shaw on banjo, Roger Williams on dobro, JD Williams on mandolin and Bob Dick on bass. Together, they deliver hard-driving rhythms, tasteful instrumentals and tight harmony vocals staying true to bluegrass tradition.

### **The Hosmer Mountain Boys**

Bridging the gap between youthful fire and seasoned mastery, The Hosmer Mountain Boys deliver a high-octane tribute to the golden era of Flatt & Scruggs. From the stages of WoodSongs Radio to Naseby, England, they offer a celebration in 1950s-style bluegrass that honors tradition while proving why they were

*We're Thrilled to Sponsor Joe Val Fest! Come Visit our Booth!*

# GREY FOX

## *Bluegrass Festival*

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voted "Fan Favorite" at the Podunk Bluegrass Festival. Embodying the vintage era, they even sport a local sponsor, Hosmer Mountain Soda. Whether on stage or talking shop about vintage instruments, this New England-based quintet works to take you back in time to experience exactly what made the world fall in love with bluegrass.

### **Berklee Bluegrass Band**

The American Roots Music Program at Berklee College of Music welcomes many of the most talented young musicians from across the globe to study at the world's preeminent music school. Led by Artistic Director Matt Glaser, the program's faculty includes Visiting Scholar Bruce Molsky, Visiting Artist Tony Trischka, along with Joe K. Walsh, Greg Liszt, Mark Simos, Tony Watt, and more. This year's Berklee Bluegrass Band showcases an extraordinary group of young artists, including Lillian Chase (fiddle), Dakota Smith (guitar), JB Cardineau (mandolin), Micah Philipp (banjo), and Devin Jones (bass).

## **Panels**

### **The Music of Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard**

Moderator: Jen Larson, Panelists: Alice Gerrard, Ken Irwin, Dudley Connell, and Laura Orshaw.

When Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard met in the early 1960s in the D.C. area and discovered their powerful vocal blend, little did they know that bluegrass music would never be the same. Their decade-long collaboration produced four seminal studio albums, and that, in combination with their social activism, set a template for subsequent generations of women in roots music. This panel, moderated by Jen Larson, will feature an intergenerational conversation with Alice Gerrard, Ken Irwin, Dudley Connell, and Laura Orshaw, to explore

the music and legacy of "Hazel and Alice" and the continued creative and archival work of Alice Gerrard, in celebration of the 2025 release of her memoir, "Custom Made Woman: A Life in Traditional Music."

### **The History of Bluegrass in Boston**

Moderator: Taylor Ackley, Panelists: Jim Rooney, Bill Nowlin and Alex MacLeod.

While bluegrass is typically associated with the South, New Englanders know that this music has roots that run deep in the North. From the early performances of the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover at the notorious Hillbilly Ranch, through the folk revival boom, to the thriving jams, concerts, and festivals hosted by the Boston Bluegrass Union, bluegrass has flourished in the Northeast for more than three quarters of a century. Celebrating the anniversaries of Joe Val's birth and the founding of the BBU, the panelists will share their research and personal experiences.

### **Joe Val at 100**

Moderator: Gerry Katz, panelists: Marian Levy, Eric Levenson, Dave Dillion and James Field. The Festival celebrates the 100th Birthday of Joe Val with a panel discussion featuring first hand stories from friends of Joe Val. Panelists include Rounder Founder Marian Levy, New England Bluegrass Boy bandmates Eric Levenson, Dave Dillon, and James Field from the Charles River Valley Boys.

**The Songwriting Craft of Hazel Dickens: An Appreciation**, a workshop by Mark Simos (Saturday 5-6pm in the Heritage room)

Mark delves into lyrical and musical delights of three classic Hazel Dickens songs, showing her masterful adaptation of traditional forms and distinctive aspects of her artistry. Since first giving this talk at IBMA in 2011, Mark has studied Hazel Dickens' songs with many young

Berklee songwriters in his class on song and tune writing in roots styles.

## Showcase Stage

Established and emerging talent performs on the Joe Val Showcase Stage in the Sovereign Room throughout the weekend. The bios for the showcase bands are below and schedule on the program book insert. The schedule will be posted outside the Showcase Stage and throughout the hotel.

## Band Biographies

### The Grillbillie Project

The Grillbillie Project is a collective of talented musicians and long-time friends who share a deep-rooted passion for bluegrass music. Having played together for years, both informally and as a professional band, they bring a natural chemistry and seasoned expertise to every performance. Their music is a testament to their enduring friendship and commitment to the genre, capturing the authentic, soulful spirit of traditional bluegrass with a collaborative energy that only decades of playing together can produce. This performance will feature Chris Marcera (guitar), Andy Reisser (banjo), Rick Brodsky (bass), Nick Zacchio (dobro) and Will Doemland (mandolin).

### The Blurs

Three-fifths of The Jeff Horton Band, this trio brings great rhythm and strong vocals to the stage. Two-time inductee into the RI Bluegrass Hall of Fame, Jeff Horton has been a fixture in New England bluegrass for almost 50 years, playing in numerous bands and leading harmony singing and other workshops at major bluegrass festivals. Matt Carlin's deft and imaginative guitar playing has led Wide Open Spaces (catch them later tonight) for 2 decades. Gary Beekmann sings some great

songs, adds harmony, and plays bass, guitar, dobro, mandolin, and a little banjo.

### Simon Brogie & The XLTs

Simon Brogie and The XLTs is a New England based Bluegrass band with rich harmonies, locomotive drive and a groove so deep you'll fall in! The XLTs is a group of all ages and backgrounds that all have the same goal: make good music that moves people. The band consists of Simon Brogie, Peter Faulkner, Greg Donlan, Phil Lee, Peggy Harvey and Redmond Day. They pull influences from all corners of American music but their heart lies with traditional Bluegrass and Country music.

### Wide Open Spaces

Eastern New England's Wide Open Spaces uses bluegrass instrumentation to play a wide open repertoire of bluegrass-tinged Americana with beautiful vocal harmonies, sparkling instrumentation, and original songs and instrumentals. Pete Anick (mandolin/fiddle), Matt Carlen (guitar), Marie Demers (guitar), Pete "Pepe" Fein (banjo), Jeff Horton (bass), and Paul Wolf (percussion) take audiences on a musical joy ride through "bluegrass without borders."



# In Loving Memory

## Gabe Hirshfeld

### A Legacy That Keeps Ringing

Gabe Hirshfeld's passion for banjo and community lives on through this OB-Grandee, donated by Gold Tone to support young musicians.

Scan the QR code to bid in the silent auction.



**The Mission:** The Gabe Hirshfeld Memorial Fund will support the musical education and development of young banjo players while preserving and advancing the community that defined Gabe Hirshfeld's life and work.



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## Showcase Stage Schedule

### Friday, Feb 13

6:30 PM - The Grillbillie Project  
7:15 PM - The Blurs  
8 PM - Simon Brogie & The XLTs  
8:45 PM - Wide Open Spaces

### Saturday, Feb 14

10 AM - The Fretbenders  
10:45 AM - Rocky Woods Express  
11:30 AM - White Mountain Ramblers  
12:30 - 2 PM - History of Bluegrass in Boston  
(Panel)  
2.30 - 4 PM - The Music of Hazel Dickens &  
Alice Gerrard (Panel)  
5 PM - The Splinters  
5:45 PM - Gentlemen's Gambit  
6:30 PM - Beyond Dixon  
7:15 PM - Sharp Five  
8 PM - The Lion Sisters  
8:45 PM - The Something Brothers featuring  
Julie Metcalf  
9:30 PM – JB and Cardineau Sin

### Sunday, Feb 15

10.45 AM - MrBill  
11.30 AM - The New Grown-Ups  
12.15 PM - Stillwater  
1 - 2 PM – Joe Val at 100 (Panel)  
2:15 PM - The Chickenshack Bluegrass Band  
3 PM – Hound & Handler

### The Fretbenders

New England Americana duo, the Fretbenders, featuring Dee Kordas (songwriter, vocals, guitar) and Bob Kordas (vocals, dobro, slide guitars, banjo), have a sound based in blues/roots music, with a dash of bluegrass & folk for good measure. Fun, toe tapping tunes served with humor and fantastic musicianship, where a “down-home barbecue meets a speakeasy.”

### Rocky Woods Express

Rocky Woods Express specializes in traditional bluegrass and country classics done in bluegrass style, with tasteful instrumental breaks and multi-part harmony vocals. The previous incarnation of Rocky Woods Express, known as Merrimack Valley Bluegrass has played at many venues and town events in the Greater Boston region including the fondly remembered Cantab Lounge. They have played bluegrass festivals across New England including Joe Val, Thomas Point Beach, and Pemi Valley. The band is Ben Silver (guitar), Edmond Boudreau (mandolin), Matt Valencius (banjo), and Greg Algieri (bass).

### White Mountain Ramblers

White Mountain Ramblers is an acoustic quartet playing bluegrass and beyond. The band features Nathaniel Haas (bass), Ben Rossetter (mandolin), Luke Bartol (fiddle), and Robbie Neeb (guitar). Playing a mix of original, familiar, and traditional music, WMR's unique sound draws from the members' diverse musical backgrounds. As outdoor enthusiasts who've lived in mountain regions across the US, they named the band after the mountain range that brought them together in 2023. Found in venues, bars, and fields across Northern New England, WMR's hot licks, three part harmonies, and fresh arrangements are

guaranteed to get you ramblin' along!

### **The Splinters**

The Splinters, a bluegrass band from Massachusetts, deliver a relentless groove to accompany their tight 3-part harmonies. Tom Pritchard (fiddle) brings the heat to his playing. J Johnson (mandolin) adds a jazzy flair to his breaks. Chris Reckling (guitar) picks solid rhythm and punchy leads, on top of Garrett Wallace's grooving bass fiddle. Newest band member, Max Petersen provides the rolling firepower on banjo. A Splinters set veers from straight ahead bluegrass to traditional fiddle tunes and back, with the occasional detour into a modern song.

### **Gentlemen's Gambit**

Part drift and part drive, Gentlemen's Gambit is a band of friends bridging the gap between modern and traditional bluegrass. Influenced by bands like Alison Krauss And Union Station, Lonesome River Band, and the Punch Brothers, they bring a fresh combination of original music and high horsepower bluegrass favorites to stages across the Northeast. Sam Stage (fiddle), Devin Jones (guitar), Quinn Eastburn (mandolin), Arlea Forbes-Prater (bass), and Micah Philipp (banjo) are all current students at the Berklee College of Music. Gentlemen's Gambit is a forward-facing testament to what young bluegrass has to offer.

### **Beyond Dixon**

Beyond Dixon is led by bassist Gary Upton (founder/owner of Upton Bass String Instrument Company) whose lifelong musical background and newfound love for bluegrass have shaped the band's direction, tone, and evolving identity. He met Cab Burkhart (guitar) and Caleb Swan (fiddle, mandolin) at Boston area jams where the late Gabe Hirshfeld encouraged them to form a band. Now with

Maxwell Petersen (banjo), Beyond Dixon blends traditional bluegrass roots with a modern, rhythmic edge, tight harmonies, strong drive, and acoustic energy that lives somewhere between the Old and the New: "Old roots, New roads – Beyond Dixon"

### **The Lion Sisters**

The Lion Sisters are a sibling duo from New Hampshire, with Josi on fiddle and vocals and Lily on guitar and vocals. Their sound, blending folk and bluegrass with Irish fiddle and vintage country, has subtle pop and rock influences, creating a warm, contemporary style that's distinctly their own. With their signature sister harmonies, musical synchronicity and genre-blending sound, they are quickly emerging as a fresh voice in the modern acoustic scene.

### **Sharp Five**

Sharp Five draws from the tradition of the great swing quintets of Reinhardt, Grappelli and Grisman. Whether offering up a jazz standard or a double banjo tune from Bill Keith, their infectious rhythms and tight arrangements will put a smile on your face. Sharp Five is a Boston area band with members Jon Pachter (banjo, vocals), Curly Merzbacher (mandolin, vocals), Sally Martin (fiddle), Mark Simmons (guitar, banjo) and Wendy Pachter (bass).

### **The Something Brothers featuring Julie Metcalf**

More foundational bluegrass from "almost The Mudsills" - Frank Drake, Dan Africk, and Michael Siegel (featuring Julie Metcalf of course)! A gathering of various yanks from the greater Boston area bluegrass scene with plenty of hot picking and sweet vocals.

### **JB and Cardineau Sin**

Mandolinist, singer, and songwriter Jean-Baptiste Cardineau manifests his unique

musical and lyrical vision with his "Nouveau-Traditional" style. He won the 2025 Freshgrass Award in mandolin and attended Berklee College of Music on a full scholarship, studying jazz, classical, and various ethnic styles while developing his spontaneous bluegrass technique. JB will be backed by Emma Turoff (bass), Stewart Werner (banjo), and Jack Holland (guitar), and perhaps some other special guests.

### **MrBill**

MrBill is a four-piece bluegrass band from the Monadnock Region of southern New Hampshire, performing traditional and original bluegrass as well as "grassified" versions of popular non-bluegrass songs. Together for three years, the group has released two albums: the all-original "When Pigs Fly," written by John Meehan and arranged by the band, and their debut, "You Can't Bit The Hog," both available on Spotify. Known for their original compositions and signature tongue-in-cheek humor, MrBill makes frequent local appearances, including monthly shows at Harlows Pub in Peterborough. John Meehan (mandolin & vocals), Matt Atkinson (guitar & vocals), Rich Sullivan (banjo) and Steve "Zuber" Armstrong (bass).

### **The New Grown-Ups**

Hailing from the Boston area, The New Grown-Ups is an octet taking a modern twist on American Roots music. They blend Traditional Folk, Country, Blues, Celtic, Old-time, Originals, Bluegrass, and Pop into a snafu of contemporary acoustic music. The band has toured regionally around New England and has an infectious onstage energy that comes with loving to perform and being around each other. The New Grown-Ups are: Ben Leddy (mandolin), Julie Metcalf (fiddle), Ben Truboff (banjo), Cecily Mills (cello), Dan Africk (guitar),

Mike Siegel (bass), Lisa Pinals (fiddle), Lindsay Straw (guitar).

### **Stillwater**

Stillwater is a bluegrass sextet founded in 2023 on the banks of the Stillwater River in Old Town, ME featuring Trip Nickel (guitar), Yoni Musher (mandolin), Kiera Luu (double bass), George Horvat (fiddle), and Jack Pasternak (dobro). Stillwater incorporates modern renditions of traditional American folk and bluegrass tunes with contemporary jamgrass, respectfully exploring their creative freedom within the wide world of improvisational music and songwriting.

### **The Chickenshack Bluegrass Band**

Chickenshack is a dynamic bluegrass band with influences from traditional bluegrass, classic rock, country and beyond. With five lead singers and high-octane harmonies, each song is entertaining and different from the song before it. Hailing from the Seacoast of New Hampshire, The Chickenshack Bluegrass Band has enjoyed performing at music festivals and fairs around New England. Chickenshack is Al Pratt (guitar, vocals), Ellen Carlson (mandolin, vocals), Paul Smith (fiddle, vocals), Tim Hedlund (banjo, vocals), Val Smith (bass, vocals, yodels).

### **Hound & Handler**

Hound & Handler is a high-energy Bluegrass/Americana stringband from Boston featuring Sean Davis on mandolin, guitar and high-lonesome harmonies, Ross Kiah on guitar and lead vocals, and Joe Everett on upright bass and vocals. Their lively original songs center around the struggles of establishing oneself in a time & place where the vast majority of money is funneled straight to the fortunate few, leaving the rest of us to fight for scraps. The band released their debut LP 'Lies

& Advice' in 2023 and followed it with the 'I Feel It All' EP in April 2025 and has been nominated for Americana Artist of the Year by the Boston Music Awards.



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