

# Tribute to Byron Berline

Courtesy *Bluegrass Unlimited*

Editor Dan Miller

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## From the Editor



Welcome to the September 2021 issue of *Bluegrass Unlimited* Magazine! As we enter the fall of the year, we are seeing more and more activity from bands, festivals, venues, and other events. Here at *Bluegrass Unlimited*, we are getting ready for the first ROMP festival in Owensboro, Kentucky, since the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum has acquired this magazine. It will be fun having the *Bluegrass Unlimited* be a part of this wonderful Owensboro event (rompfest.com). Additionally, *Bluegrass Unlimited*, ROMP, and the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and Museum will all be located at the same booth at the IBMA World of Bluegrass in Raleigh, North Carolina this year. If you plan to attend, come by our booth and say "howdy"!

We are excited about having Dan Tyminski on the cover of this issue and hope you enjoy reading about the exciting new projects that Dan is involved in these days. We are also proud to present articles about Haskel McCormick, Wilma Lee Cooper, and Nolan Faulkner in our Tradition section and equally as excited about the articles featuring Amanda Cook and Rhonda Vincent's new guitar player Zack Arnold in the Artist section of the magazine. Since the IBMA World of Bluegrass is approaching, we also take some space in this issue to introduce you to IBMA's new Executive Director Pat Morris. I hope you enjoy the September 2021 issue.

It is with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of bluegrass fiddle legend Byron Berline. We include an obituary of Byron in this issue and, on our website, we have posted several archive articles about Byron that have appeared in past issues of this magazine. We have also posted a special edition of our podcast on the podcast section of our website that features an interview that radio personality Orin Friesen conducted with Byron at the Walnut Valley Festival in 1981.

**DAN MILLER, EDITOR**  
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### 2021 Talent Directory

Our October issue will include our annual Talent Directory listing. If you would like your band to be included in the annual Talent Directory, please go to this website address and fill out the form:  
[www.bluegrassunlimited.com/talent-directory-submission/](http://www.bluegrassunlimited.com/talent-directory-submission/)

# General Store

THE NEWS

BY MURPHY HICKS HENRY / GS@BLUEGRASSUNLIMITED.COM

**H**appy September! Fall is in the air and that means the IBMA World of Bluegrass will be coming up soon. But as I write this, like many of you, I am still mourning the passing of fiddler **Byron Berline**, who was way too young to leave this world of sorrow. I didn't know Byron well, only through his music, and I count myself lucky to have played on stage one time with him, at Midwest Banjo camp in Michigan back in 2011. We were both instructors and I had boldly asked him to play "Sally Goodwin" with me on my portion of the instructors' concert, forgetting completely that he had recorded that very tune with Bill Monroe! He graciously said yes and asked if I was going to have any other players. I told him **David Grier** would play guitar and **Tom T. Ball** would be on bass.

I hadn't planned on doing any rehearsing because it didn't seem right to ask Byron to rehearse a tune he had recorded with Monroe and played a million times. But on the night of the concert, all of us were in the waiting area early so I asked Byron if he'd mind going over "Sally Goodwin" and he said he'd be happy to. He asked if I was going to kick it off or if I wanted him to. I said I'd kick it off because I wanted to do it like **Earl Scruggs**. So, we ran over it one time and I hit a good rhythm. Byron commented on that after we finished. "That was a good speed," he said. Such a simple remark, yet it meant so much.



*Cliff Waldron is one of five of this year's recipients of the IBMA Distinguished Achievement Award. Here he is show with his band, Cliff Waldron and the New Shades of Grass, circa 1974: (Left to Right) Arthur Penn, John Otsuka, Cliff Waldron, Billy Wheeler, (kneeling) Steve Wilson, Dave Auldridge*

So eventually we get on stage and I take my first break and then I pass the song to David and then David passes it on to Byron who will pass it back to me so I can end it.

The song is crackling with energy and I'm standing there listening to Byron play and he is putting everything he's got into "Sally Goodwin." He even throws in a little

bit of "Scotland," another Monroe tune. Then all of a sudden he starts playing something that sounds a bit far out to my ear and I realized I've lost where he is in the song. Arrgggh! How can I come in at the right time if I can't hear when Byron ends his break? Then just as I was about to panic, he drops back down into the simplest, most straightforward

## General Store

version of “Sally Goodwin” you can imagine. Every melody note was clear as a bell to me. I knew where he was! And as soon as he finished playing the last part of his break, he looked over at me and gave me the nod, with a little bit of a grin. It was like he was saying, “I wasn’t going to leave you hanging. Here is the melody on a silver platter. Now you take it.” And I did. And we finished up strong.

I was blown away, not only by Byron’s stellar performance, but also by his kindness in realizing I needed a helping hand to find my way back into the tune. He was a brilliant musician, a big-hearted and generous man, and he will be sorely missed. Maybe his memory be a blessing.

The IBMA has announced the 2021 inductees to the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame: **Alison Krauss**, **Lynn Morris**, and the **Stoneman Family**. During the Stoneman’s long career, the band consisted of various family members including “Pop” (Ernest), “Mom” (Hattie), **Patsy**, **Roni**, **Donna**, **Van**, **Jimmy**, and **Scotty**. Roni and Donna recently recorded their third CD for Patuxent Records, *The Legend Continues*. It certainly does.

This recipients of the IBMA Distinguished Achievement Award for 2021 are: **Nancy Cardwell Webster**, **Lee Michael Demsey**, **Jaroslav Prucha**, **Cliff Waldron**, and **Stan Zdonik**. Congratulations to all these folks who have worked so hard and done so much for bluegrass music.

Guitar legend **Tony Rice** will be inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame in October. The double-induction ceremony will also feature the 2020 class of inductees which includes the **Briarhoppers**, a band which formed in 1934 and is the oldest continuing bluegrass group in the world.

**Brittany Haas** and **Mike Compton** have been chosen as new Artists in Residence for the 2021-2022 academic year at East Tennessee State University. Brittany is one of the most influential fiddlers of her generation and Mike is one of the best-known proponents and interpreters of Bill Monroe’s mandolin style.

Registration is now open for the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual International Acoustic Music Awards (IAMA). Sponsors include Acoustic Café and Sirius XM Radio. There are eight different categories including Bluegrass/Country and Instrumental. For more info go to: [inacoustic.com](http://inacoustic.com). The deadline to enter is November 5<sup>th</sup>.

### *Keeping Up With The Bands*

The **Lonesome River Band** welcomes bass player **Kameron Keller** to the band. He replaces **Barry Reed** who has been with the group for over ten years...Mountain Fever Records has signed **Lee Street Lyrical** to their Americana label, Travianna Records. Lee Street Lyrical is a duo from Arkansas featuring **Buddy Case** on guitar and **Casey Penn** on fiddle... Patuxent Music has signed **The Country Gentlemen Tribute Band** to record their first new album since the death of their founder, **Bill Yates**, in 2015.

### *In The Studios*

**Jeremy Stephens**, a multi-instrumentalist with the group **High Fidelity**, has released his second solo project (in 20 years!), *How I Hear It*. He calls it “A picture of where I am on my musical journey.” Co-produced by his wife **Corrina Rose Logston**, the album includes straight-up bluegrass, old-time gospel, and brother-style duet

singing and features **Jeremy** on guitar, banjo, and mandolin... **The Lonesome River Band** announces their new album, *Singing Up There: A Tribute To The Easter Brothers*. As many of you know, the **Easter Brothers**, from Mt. Airy, N.C., helped pave the way for bluegrass gospel music...*Come Home*, the brainchild of pastor **Quigg Lawrence** of Roanoke, Virginia, is a gospel-oriented CD that was recorded by a group of church members and musical friends including **Chris Eldridge**, **Junior Sisk**, and **Justin Moses**... **Chris Silver** (fiddle, mandolin) and **Craig Evans** (old-time banjo) have recorded an album cleverly titled *Old-Timeless Conversations*. **Ari Silver** plays bass. It comes with a 12-page booklet describing the music and the process...**Lori King & Junction 63** have released a new recording titled *Walking the Blues*. **Junction 63**, a band based in Iowa, includes **Lori King** on bass, **Joe King** on guitar, **Mark Hargrove** on banjo, **Kyle Murphy** on fiddle, and **Kevin Amburgey** on mandolin...*Dream Rich, Dirt Poor*, from North Carolina songwriter **Aaron Burdett**, features mandolinist **Daniel Ullom** and bassist **Kim France**, who are members of his regular trio, along with multi-instrumentalist **David Johnson**, fiddler **Carley Arrowood** and banjo player **Derek Vaden**...**The Chuck Wagon Gang**, known affectionately as the “Chucks” and now in its third generation, has released *Radio Days* which focuses primarily on new recordings of songs that the original Chucks performed on radio. The CD includes some of their early non-gospel songs like “I Want To Be A Real Cowboy Girl.” 

# The Tradition

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## Notes & Queries

WRITTEN BY **GARY REID**  
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### OVER JORDAN

Byron Berline (July 6, 1944 - July 10, 2021) was a multi-instrumentalist who played music for over seventy years. He is fondly remembered by the bluegrass community not only for his musical talent, which he possessed in spades, but also for his giving nature and pleasant disposition. While he was known primarily for his fiddle work, he also played mandolin and guitar.

Byron was born in Caldwell, Kansas, but grew up in Oklahoma and started out on the fiddle at age five. Getting him started on the right track was his father, Lue Berline, who was a championship old-time fiddler. Fiddle albums by Tommy Jackson and Howdy Forrester influenced Byron's early playing and when he later discovered bluegrass, Chubby Wise and Kenny Baker were very inspirational.

In his mid-teens, Byron began attending—and winning—regional fiddle contests. (He went on to be a two-time—1965 and 1970—Grand Champion fiddler at the prestigious National Old Time Fiddle Contest in Weiser, Idaho.) He met the Dillards in 1964 and subsequently appeared on their *Pickin' and Fiddlin'* album on Elektra. This led to Byron's appearance with the group at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Bill Monroe was also in attendance at the festival and offered the young fiddler

a job with the Blue Grass Boys. He passed on the opportunity and endeavored to complete his college studies; he earned a B. A. in Physical Education from the University of Oklahoma. Following graduation, Byron embarked on what would become a lengthy career in music. He started out at the top and spent parts of 1966 and 1967 working for Bill Monroe; he recorded three tunes with Monroe: "Gold Rush," "Virginia Darling," and "Sally Goodin'." Those tunes still rate as some of Monroe's best instrumental work of the 1960s.

During a two-year stint in the Army (1967-1969) he was assigned to Special Services and was afforded numerous opportunities to play music. Shortly before being discharged, he received a request from Doug Dillard in California to help with the recording of an album. It was the start of a musically-active twenty-six-year stay out west. His associations there included Dillard & Clark, 1969-1970; Dillard Expedition, 1970-71; Country Gazette (which he co-founded and with which he recorded several influential albums including *Traitor in our Midst* and *Don't Give Up Your Day Job*), 1971-75; Sundance,

1975-85; Berline, Crary & Hickman, 1978-90; L. A. Fiddle Band, 1978-93; and California, 1990-96. He also recorded a fiddle and banjo album with longtime friend John Hickman called *Double Trouble*.

Byron was also an in-demand



Byron Berline

session player and appeared on recordings by The Byrds, The Eagles, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, John Denver, Elton John, Vince Gill, Emmylou Harris, Jethro Burns, John Hartford, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Don Reno, and Earl Scruggs. He also supplied instrumental music for numerous television programs and movies.

Byron returned to Oklahoma

in 1995 and settled in the town of Guthrie. He was joined by John Hickman who shared a similar desire for a slower, less-hectic pace of life. In Guthrie, Byron organized the Byron Berline Band and also launched the Double Stop Music Shop; he was devastated when fire destroyed the shop in 2019. More than anything, it was the loss of vintage instruments that would never again be played or handed down from one generation to the next that distressed him most. He was able to reopen at a new location but expressed the opinion that he would never be able to fully erase the memory of the fire's destruction. A more recent, personal loss came only a few months ago when John Hickman preceded him in passing (see July 2021 "Notes & Queries").

Byron was an inductee to the Oklahoma Musicians Hall of Fame, was the driving force behind the Oklahoma International Bluegrass Festival, and was a 2012 recipient of the International Bluegrass Music Association's Distinguished Achievement award. The Berline family asked that in lieu of flowers, donations to the Oklahoma International Bluegrass Festival Youth Scholarship Fund will be appreciated. 🍷

