



## A HISTORY OF THE BANJO

PBS.org, (currently producing and broadcasting an excellent series entitled *American Roots Music*) says of the banjo "if the fiddle was the primary contribution to American music from northern Europe, the banjo was the primary contribution from Africa. The banjo has been called 'the outstanding American contribution to the music of folklore,' and can be traced back in some form to sub-Saharan cultures of the 13th century. It was almost certainly brought to the New World by slaves."

Tony Thomas, an astute African American scholar of the banjo, states: "early banjos resembled plucked full spike folk lutes like the *akonting* of Gambia,

Akongting player in Bagaya. Wikipedia commons.  
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## SINGER-SONGWRITER TV SHOW, BASED IN C-BUS, KEEPS GROWING NATIONWIDE

Columbus, now the 14th largest city in America, certainly has been raising its profile over the last few years as a vital songwriting and music community. We're grateful that our public television show,

Article by Eric Gnezda, Host & Founder

*Songs at the Center*, is playing a notable role in our city's musical success.

When I conceived the show four years ago, I envisioned a

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**Songs at the Center**

weekly series showcasing the top songwriting talent in Columbus. Locally produced, the show, I believed, might have some

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Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau and the *bunchundo* of Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Like these instruments, early banjos had gourd or calabash bodies covered by a skin membrane and wood bridges held by string tension. Most early banjos had four gut or fiber strings, often three long and one short drone string." Daniel Jatta, (whose ancestors are the Jola people of Gambia) plays a song composed by his father on the *akonting*. Query Daniel Jatta on You Tube.

Thomas goes on to say: "First reported in Jamaica in 1687 and in Martinique in 1698, until the 19th century the banjo was identified exclusively with black people. Banjos rang [out] in Barbados, Antigua, St. Kitts, St. Croix, Suriname, and Haiti in the 1700s and early 1800s. First reported in North America in Manhattan in 1736, by the early 1800s, black folk played banjos from New England to Louisiana."

Thomas continues: "*The Old Plantation*, painted before 1790 by South Carolina planter John Rose, depicts a black banjoist and a black drummer playing for black dancers. By the 1830s, white entertainers wearing black face makeup and singing what they called *black songs* adopted the banjo. Known as "minstrels" by the 1840s, they became widely popular, touring the United States, Britain, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. Though they reflected American racism, their music and dance launched worldwide interest in black music and the banjo."

In its summary history of the

banjo, PBS.org states: "This early black folk tradition eventually transferred the banjo to whites, especially in the Appalachians. Here, musicians made banjo heads out of groundhog skins and adapted their songs to the instrument's harmonics." PBS goes on to relay: "A parallel tradition began to develop in the 1840's, with the popularity of minstrel shows, in which



*The Banjo Lesson.* 1893 Oil painting by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Public Domain.

professional entertainers performed songs and dances derived from what they interpreted to be black culture. The banjo became the central instrument of these "plantation melodies" and songs like *Old Dan Tucker* entered the pantheon of vernacular music. Early on in the minstrel show era, a Virginian named Joel Sweeny popularized a type of banjo with a fifth, short string and used it to develop a more complex picking

style. Billed as "The Banjo King," Sweeny toured widely in the years before the Civil War."

Thomas states: "[By the 1840s] wood frame rims to stretch the skin replaced the gourds. A commercial banjo industry appeared linking entertainers, sellers of banjo music, and manufacturers. By the late 19th century, metal covered or replaced the wooden frame rims entirely, frets were added, metal strings replaced gut, and a variety of mechanisms were added to banjos to produce a loud, clear, treble sound."

Thomas continues: "black banjoists adopted these innovations to make even more powerful music. Black dances powered by banjo persisted into the twentieth century. Though black banjoists, white show business banjoists, parlor banjoists, and white Southern folk banjoists exchanged tunes and techniques, the drive of black banjoists to play for African American dancers preserved black banjo's distinctive West African musical approaches.

"After the Civil War, black minstrel companies offered real African American music, not pale imitations, eclipsing the white minstrels' popularity by 1900. African American banjo syncopation helped inspire ragtime, a combination of folk, popular, and art music born in the Black Midwest that became internationally popular in the 1890s and 1900s. Scott Joplin, the great ragtime composer, dedicated compositions to black banjoists. More ragtime banjo

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records than piano records appeared in the early 1900s. As banjo playing became a vital part of turn of the century popular music, black banjoists like Horace Weston, the Bohee Brothers, Hosea Eason, and James Bland became international stars. Black banjo playing probably reached its height before World War I."

Meanwhile, ". . .middle class African Americans formed banjo, mandolin, and guitar clubs. [Also] James Reese Europe, New York's foremost bandleader who bridged ragtime and jazz, led a band that featured six banjoists among only ten musicians and formed concert orchestras with scores of banjos. Query James Reese Europe on You Tube or [Listen Here](#). New banjos without drone strings and played with flat picks arose in the 20th Century: tenor banjos, tuned like violas, six-string guitar banjos, mandolin banjos, and plectrum banjos, modeled on the five string banjo without the fifth string."

PBS' summary of the banjo continues: "In 1945, a young man from North Carolina named Earl Scruggs took the banjo in a different direction. He perfected a three-finger "roll" which allowed him to play a rapid-fire cascade of notes that allowed the banjo to hold its own in the driving tempos of the new bluegrass music. Scruggs, who was as much a structural engineer as musical genius, also experimented with ways to improve the instrument's sound, and devices

like the "Scruggs tuner" which allowed the player to bend notes by tightening and loosening the strings. Scruggs became probably the single most influential instrumentalist in American roots music, as generations of younger musicians took his style and built on it. By the end of the century, young devotees like Bela Fleck had moved the banjo well into the arena of jazz and even formal music."

**The banjo is such a happy instrument  
– you can't play a sad song on the  
banjo - it always comes out so  
cheerful.**

– Steve Martin

**My most powerful memory was  
hearing Earl Scruggs on The Beverly  
Hillbillies as a 5 or 6 year old. That  
sound just blew me away, shook my  
head up.**

– Bela Fleck

**It's challenging and fun. [To someone  
thinking of taking it up] -- be prepared  
to practice often!**

– CFMS member, Carl Yaffey

**They think the banjo can only be  
happy, but that's not true.**

– Bela Fleck

Thomas relates that folklorists and banjo enthusiasts in the 20th century "found and documented surviving black banjoists like Dink Roberts, Nate and Odell Thompson, Rufus Kasey, Elizabeth Cotton, Lewis Hairston, and Etta Baker. Scholars like Dena Epstein and Cece Conway, reaffirmed the African ancestry, Caribbean origins, and Black American history of the banjo."

Thomas goes on to say: "starting with 1960s folk blues performers

Taj Mahal and Otis Taylor, a new generation revived Black banjo playing. . .and the 2005 *Black Banjo Gathering* in Boone, North Carolina brought this revival to a new stage. Featuring scholars and players of West African music; black banjoists like Jazz banjoist Don Vappie; the Ebony Hillbillies, New York's black string band; the young black musicians who later formed the Grammy-winning *Carolina Chocolate Drops*; banjo

historians like Robert Winans and Cece Conway; and leading banjoists like Mike Seeger and Bela Fleck, the gathering celebrated both African American banjo heritage and the Black banjo revival. Since the gathering, scholars from Africa, Europe, and North America have vastly expanded our knowledge of the banjo's African roots, Caribbean origin, and African American history. Black banjoists have become a growing feature of both folk music and jazz. Young musicians, black and white, have even taken up the *akonting* and other West African instruments

that are the banjo's ancestors. The banjo's African American heritage is celebrated worldwide."

The bulk of this article was written by Tony Thomas, a leading African American scholar of the banjo. Thomas organized the 2005 *Black Banjo Gathering*, served as contributing historian to the PBS documentary *Give Me the Banjo*, plays banjo and guitar with the *Ebony Hillbillies*, and has presented on Black banjo history and taught banjo at old time music, blues, and banjo festivals, universities, and public schools in the United States and Europe. His work has been published in periodicals like *The Black Scholar* and the *Old Time Herald*.

Singer-Songwriter TV Show – from page 1

appeal to a wider audience somewhere down the road. But I never dreamed that in less than two years, we would be syndicated by American Public

have showcased approximately 80 singer-songwriters who are either based in Ohio, or have strong ties to our state. In addition to spotlighting many lesser-known artists who deserve wider



Songs at the Center taping (public welcome). Eric Gnezda (keyboard) and performer Todd Burge. Photo courtesy of Dan Mitchell of Mitchell Multimedia.

Television, with a national network of more than 150 stations. We're also happy to report that we air in four of the nation's Top Five markets, thanks in large part to the efforts of our Executive Producer, Jack Fitzgerald, whom Columbus radio audiences remember from his days as Operations Manager at WTVN radio.

We remain forever appreciative to Stacia Hentz, the program director at WOSU TV, for her belief in our series—and, of course, to our main sponsors, The James Cancer Hospital, the Ohio Arts Council, and the Academy of Country Music Lifting Lives program. We are also indebted to the McConnell Arts Center, which has served as our home since the beginning.

Having just completed our third season, we are proud that we

audiences, we have featured Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Inductee John Oates, Three-Time Grammy Winner Delbert McClinton, Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame Inductee Gretchen Peters, Grammy Award Winner Don Henry, and Americana Legend Tom Russell.

We're also pleased that our regional media is taking notice, as we've been profiled this year in *Columbus CEO*, *Ohio Magazine*, and the *Columbus Dispatch*.

Production for Season Four is underway, led by an episode with Cleveland native, Marc Cohn, who wrote and recorded the iconic song of the 90s, "Walking in

Memphis." The season will also include at least one episode featuring five student songwriters who were discovered through two statewide workshops we conducted, "Songwriting in the Spotlight," sponsored by the Ohio Arts Council, in collaboration with Lakewood's Beck Center for the Arts, and Marietta's Peoples Bank Theatre.

Our next taping is scheduled for July 21, from noon-4 p.m., at a venue to be determined. Among the guests will be Ohio's own Jerry Salley, now of Nashville, who is a nominee for Songwriter of the Year by the International Bluegrass Music Association. ***Tapings are free and open to the public.***

***In Columbus, Songs at the Center airs Saturday nights at 11 on WOSU TV as the lead-in to Austin City Limits.***

For more information on Songs at the Center—and to receive all our latest information—please visit our website ([SongsAtTheCenter.com](http://SongsAtTheCenter.com)) and sign up for our weekly newsletter.

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Grammy award winner: Don Henry (left), Anne E. DeChant, Host Eric Gnezda, and Craig Carothers. Photo courtesy of Dan Mitchell of Mitchell.

# DULCI-MORE: A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO A FOLK FESTIVAL

by Bill Cohen

This year's Central Ohio Folk Festival, Southwest of Columbus, had more than 4,000 people attending. By contrast, this year's Dulci-More festival in the small Northeast Ohio town of Lisbon had only around 200.

But don't judge (or misjudge) Dulci-More by measuring its success by those numbers.

My wife Randi and I attended it for the very first time in late May, and we were charmed by it.

The small attendance number is easily explained by the fact that

folk music and the Columbus Folk Music Society.

In contrast, the Dulci-More participants pay, and instructional workshops are the core of the festival. At Dulci-More, there are no casual listeners or participants as there are at COFF. Instead, the Dulci-More attendees are all plugged into the music.

Like COFF, Dulci-More offers several mini-concerts on Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday. But unlike COFF, Dulci-More's concerts are reserved for lunch breaks and evenings. The

Hammer Dulcimer," "Playing strong rhythm on the Mountain Dulcimer," and "'Rags, Reels, and Jigs for Hammer Dulcimer." Other instruments are included, though. For example, this year had workshops on "Hawaiian music on Ukulele," "Snappy Dance Tunes for Harp," and "Introduction to Bowed Psaltery." Some guy from Columbus even led workshops on "1960's Anti-war Movement Songs" and on "Civil Rights Songs of the Early 1960's."

Dulci-More takes place at an old Boy Scout camp. It has seen better days, but it has an intimate feel and charm that fits the musical theme. The main focus is a big wooden dining hall, where meals are served, vendors sell their wares, concerts are staged, and some workshops happen.

Dozens of participants sleep right at the camp, either in small RV's or in their own tents. Since the crowd is relatively small and everyone is there to learn and enjoy music for the full 2.5 days of the festival, a special community spirit of camaraderie is quickly built.

It just goes to show that there's more than one way to stage a folk music festival. With pride, we can enjoy our own Central Ohio festival with a lot more people, but one of these years, trek up to Lisbon Ohio and experience the positives of a more tightly-knit festival, Dulci-More.



Dulci-More uses a much different approach than COFF. At the Central Ohio festival, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of those attending stumble onto the festival by accident, having come to the Metro Park for a picnic or a hike and then are so delighted by the free concerts and kids' activities that they stay to enjoy them. We see that as a positive because it exposes a lot of new people to

the main focus of Dulci-More is the instructional workshops, and there are a lot of them – at any one time, 9 different workshops are happening, and those hourly workshops occur during 7 different hours.

Since Dulci-More began as a dulcimer festival, most of the workshops center on that instrument. Among this year's titles: "Beginning Chording for

# TWO FAIRS: CFMS WELL REPRESENTED BY JAMMERS

Two central Ohio fairs are happening in July and CFMS members will be represented at each of them.



**The Franklin County Fair** runs from Saturday, July 15 - July 22. **CFMS members will jam at the gazebo in the historical village on Sunday, July 16 from 2-4pm.** For musicians willing to donate your time and talent, there are twelve passes available and 4 car passes. Contact Linda McDonald at: milocurtis444@yahoo.com for arrangements. Interested in some of the other fair events as well? Here is a partial list of daily highlights: Saturday, July 15 – Car Show, (Registration Noon-2 pm); KOI Drag Racing 7 pm; Sunday, July 16 – Harness Racing (Post Time 5 pm); Monday, July 17 – Harness Racing (Post Time 5 pm); Tuesday, July 18 – Buckeye Rodeo, 7:30 pm; Wednesday, July 19 – Draft Horse Pull 7 pm; Thursday, July 20 – COTPC Truck Pull 7 pm; Friday, July 21– NTPA National Pulling Event, 7:30 pm.



**The Ohio State Fair** runs from July 26 to August 6, 2017. **CFMS members will jam on Friday, July 28 from 10am to 2pm in front of the Pioneer Cabin** in the Natural Resources area of the fair. Contact Mike Hale at: mike@oldshoemusic.com for pass arrangements in event there are still some available.

**The Ohio State Fair** runs from July 26 to August 6, 2017. **CFMS members will jam on Friday, July 28 from 10am to**

# CFMS ANNUAL MEETING ELECTIONS UPDATE

We did not conduct our annual meeting/election of board members at the June picnic, but will at the July picnic. So please plan on attending and cast your vote!

As previously published: ***the 2017-2018 slate of proposed nominees is as follows:***

**Officers** - President, Hugh Farthing; Vice President, Mike Hale; Treasurer, Charlie Flowers; Secretary, Diane Boston; Honorary Vice President, Chris Bolles;

**Trustees** - Steven Hopkins, Dan Clarke, Linda McDonald,

Pete Instabella, Bill Cohen, Linda Bolles, Dave Fultz, Carl Yaffey, Jim Luckaupt, Beth Bradley, Stan Bradley, Tom Nagel, Jackie LaMuth, Greg Denby, Cathy Sheets.

***The elections/potluck jam and picnic will be held in Clintonville on Sunday, July 30 (1:30-4pm)*** at the home of Jane VanAuken (location details page 7). Annual meeting/election begins at 1:30 pm followed by potluck picnic & jam running until 4 pm. Bring a dish to share & your instrument and/or singing voice or just your ears! Picnic is open to the general public.

## CORRECTION – DATES OF COLUMBUS COMMONS’ JAMS

The dates of the Columbus Commons’ Jams were published erroneously in the June newsletter. The correct remaining dates are:

**Fridays July 21st and**

***August 18th – 10am to 1pm.*** Bring your kids’ songs to share with an appreciative young audience! Contact Dan Clarke for further info at: dan41n@att.net.

## CFMS JAM TENT AT “10TV & METRO PARKS OUTDOOR ADVENTURE” EVENT JULY 15

Consider attending this free event at Highbanks Metro Park (Big Meadows picnic area) on Saturday, July 15 and contributing your time/talent to represent the CFMS under the CFMS jam tent!

***Event is from 10am-4pm. Jamming can be as short or as long as you wish.*** CFMS contact: dboston2@columbus.rr.com. More info at: 10TV & Metro Parks Outdoor Adventure.

**Seriously folks, post this on your frig!**

# SAVE THE DATE . . .

## | The Saturday Music Jam at Worthington Farmer's Market

| 9:30-11:30am – Outside on the S.E. quad of Worthington Square. All welcome to play. Consider bringing a chair.

**Wednesdays, July 12 & 26, 2-3pm: Jam at Laurels of Worthington** (for Memory Care Unit) – 1030 N. High St., Worthington. Contact Dan Clarke at: dan41n@att.net to be put on an e-mail list.

**Every Wednesday, Franklin Conservatory Jam, 3:30pm-6:30pm (new location-main parking lot).** Contact Dan Clarke at: dan41n@att.net to be put on an e-mail list.

## | Every Thursday, NEW JAM, South Side Market (Merion Village), 5-7pm:

next to Tatoheads Public House, 1297 Parsons Ave, Cols. Contact Dan Clarke at: dan41n@att.net to be put on an e-mail list.

**Saturday, July 15 (10am-4pm): 10TV & Metro Parks Outdoor Adventure / CFMS Jam Tent.** Tent open to all jammers all day. Free event. Big Meadows area of Highbanks Metro Park.

**Sunday, July 16 (2-4pm): Franklin Co. Fair/jam at gazebo.** Contact for event: Linda McDonald at: milocurtis444@yahoo.

**Fridays, July 21 & Aug 18 (10am-1pm) : Columbus**

## I WANT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT | THE COLUMBUS FOLK MUSIC | SOCIETY AND IT'S EVENTS?

| Visit: [www.columbusfolkmusic.org](http://www.columbusfolkmusic.org)

| OR join as a member. Benefits include: camaraderie with fellow folk music lovers in town, discounts on certain admissions, this monthly newsletter and the comfort of knowing that all events are family friendly! A membership form is found page 8.

# | FOLLOWING OUR OWN

**Thursday, July 13, 2pm: Joanie Calem:** Songs That Tell Stories, Reynoldsburg, OH Public Library.

**Thursday, July 22, 7-10pm: Avalon Nine** (duo/trio) at Java Central, 20 S. State St, Westerville.

**Saturday, July 15, 2:30pm-3:30pm; Halfway Home at 10TV**

& Metro Parks Outdoor Adventure Event at Highbanks Metro Park, 9466 Columbus Pike, Lewis Center, OH 43035. Free.

**Sunday, July 16, 3pm: Whinestopper** at Tea at Three Concert at Bexley Public Library, 2411 E. Main St, Cols. Come for music, tea, and cookies! Free event.

**Commons for Kids Event at Columbus Commons.** CFMS folks sing songs for kids. Sound set up provided. Contact Dan Clarke at: dan41n@att.net.

**Friday, July 28 (10am - 2pm): Ohio State Fair/jam at Pioneer Cabin** (Natural Resources area). Contact for event: Mike Hale at: mike@oldshoemusic.com.

**Sunday, July 30: (1:30pm - 4pm). CFMS Annual General Meeting/Elections (1:30pm) followed by potluck picnic and jam (until 4pm).** All welcome (members and non-members). All CFMS members (dues current) eligible to vote. Location: 250 Irving Way West, Columbus, OH 43214 (Clintonville).

Banjo players & listeners are invited to a meeting of the American Banjo Fraternity Oct 12-14, 2017. Please check website for updates: [www.banjofraternity.org](http://www.banjofraternity.org). Free concert at 7:30 pm on October 14. If you are a music professional, an amateur musician, or interested in banjo & music history, you will find worthwhile music that will challenge your skills and expand your repertoire. Not bluegrass or clawhammer, most of the music dates from 1880-1920 and played on nylon strings with bare fingers & no picks. Good examples on You Tube under "Classic Banjo". Meeting location: Newark Garden Hotel, 125 N. Main St., Newark, NY, 14513. 315-331-9500. We welcome guests without charge except for food and lodging. If you wish to attend, please contact joelhooks@me.com.

**Friday, July 21, 6-8pm: Halfway Home** at American Legion Bandstand "Friday Night Live", 215 Park St, Cardington, OH 43315.

**Saturday, July 22, 9pm-Midnite: Grassahol** at Rambling House Soda Pop, 310 E. Hudson - Columbus, OH. \$5 cover.

# The Columbus Folk Music Society

P.O. Box 20735  
Columbus, OH 43220



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## Next Issue in August

We're on the web!

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

### BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COLUMBUS FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  I'm new to this  I'm back for more

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone (Day): \_\_\_\_\_ (Eve.): \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell): \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address(es) (if a household membership): \_\_\_\_\_

Membership renewals are due annually on September 30th. For new members, please check one of the membership levels listed below & pro-rate the amount of your check as indicated. If joining during the month of:

Feb-April: Your membership level amount x .5      May-July: Your membership level amount x .25

Aug-Oct: Your membership level amount as listed      Nov-Jan: Your membership level amount x .75

- Individual \$20
- Household \$25
- Good Friend \$50

- Sponsor \$100
- Patron \$200
- Silver \$250

- Gold (Life Member) \$500
- Yes! Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities within the organization.

For credit card transactions: contact [treasurer@columbusfolkmusicociety.org](mailto:treasurer@columbusfolkmusicociety.org). Membership amounts are tax-deductible.

Please send completed form and payment to:  
The Columbus Folk Music Society  
P.O. Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220

In an effort to be both fiscally and environmentally responsible, we will send a full-color, interactive newsletter via e-mail unless you request a hard copy be mailed to you.  
 I prefer a hard copy via regular U.S. mail

I enjoy the annual Central Ohio Folk Festival (early May): Lots 5 4 3 2 1 Not (please circle one)