



Cold Chocolate, Sunday - March 30

INTERVIEW BY MICHELLE HUGHES

Cold Chocolate is a genre-bending Americana band that fuses folk, funk and bluegrass to create a unique sound all their own. Led by Ethan Robbins (vocals/guitar/mandolin) and Ariel Bernstein (vocals/percussion/banjo), the Boston-based duo released their fifth full-length album in the fall of 2023. Punctuated by tight harmonies and skillful musicianship, Cold Chocolate has quickly gained recognition for their original music and high-energy shows. The band has shared bills with Leftover Salmon, David Grisman, and Angelique Kidjo, and regularly performs at venues and music festivals across the country. Learn more at www.coldchocolatemusic.com.

Cold Chocolate will be performing as part of the Americana/Folk Concert Series at a special time and location, Sunday, March 30, at 2:30 pm (doors open at 1:30) at Natalie's Grandview. Pre-purchase of tickets is recommended at <https://www.showclix.com/tickets/cold-chocolate-h4gise9> as tickets are limited.

Michelle Hughes: Thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions! So I have to admit that I did my research and found out that the origin of the band's name - Cold Chocolate - comes from a childhood memory related to frozen Milky Way bars awaiting you in your grandfather's freezer after long road-trips to visit him. What do you think

[See Cold Chocolate.,pg.2](#)

*'Love is in the air
Get up, get out
Spring is everywhere'*

*-Bernie Baum, Bill
Giant, & Florence Kaye*

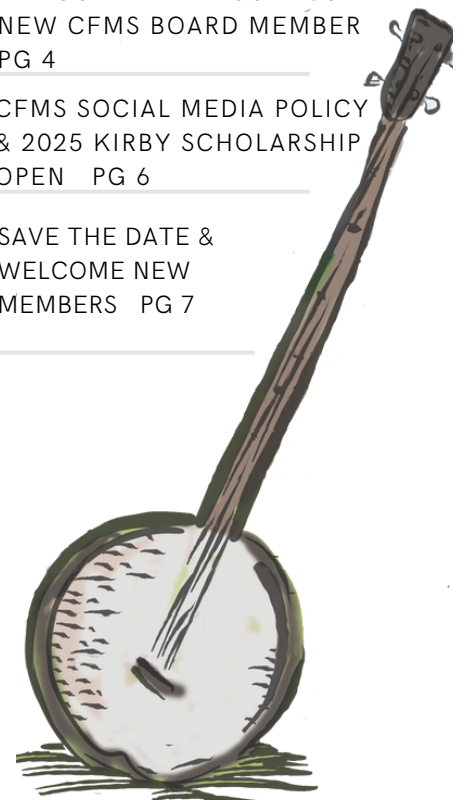
A Different Strummer Newsletter Highlights

COLD CHOCOLATE -
MARCH 30 PERFORMER
INTERVIEW PG 1

WELCOME KEVIN JOHNSON
NEW CFMS BOARD MEMBER
PG 4

CFMS SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
& 2025 KIRBY SCHOLARSHIP
OPEN PG 6

SAVE THE DATE &
WELCOME NEW
MEMBERS PG 7



Cold Chocolate, from pg 1

he'd think about the band's name as a tribute to this memory?

Cold Chocolate: I'm sure he'd appreciate it, although I doubt the frozen Milky Ways cast as strong a meaning for him as it did for my brothers and me at the time. It is nice to remember him so presently when telling the origin story of our band's name.

Michelle: Alright, so something else I've got to be honest about - pretty much every artist I've interviewed has got some kind of blurb saying that they are bringing a unique sound to folk music. The cool thing about that is I always agree that that is the case! That said, what is it about Cold Chocolate's style that sets you apart? Who are some of your major influences?

Cold Chocolate: Our band goes back over ten years, and our sound has evolved tremendously over that time. When we began, we were a four-piece, including upright bass and banjo, playing mostly bluegrass. As our band grew over the years, so did our sonic reach. However, we've kept elements of everything we've done along the way. So, although our newest stuff is heavier, bluesier, and more rock and roll, the folky bluegrassy stuff is still very present in our writing and in our live sound. Some of our biggest influences are The Band, The Grateful Dead, Paul Simon, The Wood Brothers, Watchhouse, John Hartford...the list goes on for miles.

Michelle: Versatility is definitely something that I think is a hallmark of Cold Chocolate's music - in the same album, I find myself going from rocking out to some crunchy guitar work, to feeling my heartbeat race a mile-a-minute with some fingerpicking

banjo, to swaying back and forth to some bluesy keyboard work. Given all of this variety, what do you think is the main artistic throughline in your work? What connects it all and ultimately, would make a listener say "Ah! That's definitely a Cold Chocolate song"?

Cold Chocolate: Musically, Ariel and I just let each other do anything and everything we want, and, so far, it all seems to have a place within our live show. Over the pandemic, Ariel taught himself the banjo, and we quickly introduced that to our set. I think what connects it all is the fun that we have doing all that we can do. The energy we bring to all of our music, be it an electric guitar/drum duo or a banjo/mandolin duo, it is all quintessentially us.

Michelle: It's pretty rad that 50% of Cold Chocolate is from Ohio - or at least went to college in Ohio. Welcome back! Is there anything about Ohio or the Midwest that is reflected in your musical style or lyrical choices?

Cold Chocolate: I truly loved my time at Oberlin and still think back so fondly on that experience. The concept of traveling and living on the road is quite a prominent theme throughout our lyrics, quite simply, because we spend so much of our lives doing just that. So perhaps it's not "Ohio" that is reflected, but rather, all of the places we've been and experiences we've had driving across this vast country of ours, and the ever-present call we have to home.

Michelle: For your 5th album, you've pulled a Weezer - you've made an album

of cover songs from the past 50 years or so. However, I think you did them one better and definitely made these songs your own - in your own signature style, rather than just a "same, but different" version. What made you decide to go in this direction after four albums of original work?

Cold Chocolate: We started conceptualizing this album at the beginning of Covid, when it became clear that we wouldn't be able to get together for quite some time. So, because we couldn't write new music together, we decided to create this album of covers. The through-line for it was nostalgia. Songs that brought us to a happy place in our memories. Be it songs that we grew up with, that our parents introduced us to, or songs that we'd found on the radio as kids, it's an album of chicken-soup-for-the-soul, but in music form.

Michelle: How did you choose the songs on "Now That's What I Call Cold Chocolate, Vol. 1"? Which ones are your favorite and why?

Cold Chocolate: It was a difficult decision, narrowing down which ones we'd focus on for the album. We wanted to showcase the extent of what we can do live through an amalgamation of songs. So, we chose everything from hard-driving rock songs like Aerosmith's "Walk this Way" where we could really dig into our heavy rock sensibilities, to quiet folksy songs like Nick Drake's "Pink Moon" where we could showcase our harmonies and acoustic prowess. The songs that became this collection all seemed to fit together conceptually in that way.

Michelle: Does the fact that you've called it "Vol 1" mean we are going to get a second volume at some point? If so, I'd like to



Photo Courtesy of Cold Chocolate

suggest a Cold Chocolate of "You Sexy Thing" by Hot Chocolate! Are there any songs you wanted to include on Volume 1 that didn't make the cut?

Cold Chocolate: We're 90's kids, so we had a lot of silly 90's songs on the list that didn't make Volume 1. Perhaps we'll do a Volume 2 in the future, time will tell. One that I've always wanted to do is "Black-Hearted Woman" by the Allman Brothers. But currently, we are focused on a new album of original music, which we've been in the studio recording since the end of 2024.

Michelle: To help our readers who might not be familiar with Cold Chocolate - can you recommend a couple of songs off of your previous albums that you think will really give them a sense of what it's like to experience a Cold Chocolate show? And tell us why you've picked those songs?

Cold Chocolate: "Follow Far Behind" from our album "Down the Line" is one that always resonates strongly with me every time we play it. It's one I wrote shortly before my first daughter was born, that started out as a list of life lessons I hoped to impart to her. It has a lot of energy and always conjures up such strong memories for me of her earliest years experiencing all of the craziness that is life.

Welcome CFMS' Newest Board Member, Kevin Johnson

INTERVIEW BY JIM MCHIE

Interviewer's Note: Kevin Johnson, CFMS' newest Board of Directors Member, grew up on music, from piano to marching band to concert and jazz band to guitar in college and finally into a 28-year career in musical instruments. Let's get to know our newest Board Member.

Jim McHie: First, can you provide a high-level background on yourself?

Kevin Johnson: I grew up on the east side of Columbus, graduating from Groveport-Madison High School in 1982. I went on to study Marketing at OSU, getting my BS in Marketing. I worked in the grocery industry, for about 10 years, last working for the JM Smucker company out of Orrville, Ohio.

Jim: What led you to start KIP Music almost 30 years ago? Can you talk a little bit about how it has evolved, and where it is at now?

Kevin: In the summer of 1995, I found myself unemployed and living in Akron having just worked for Smuckers. I decided I wanted to move back to Columbus where my friends and family were, and answered an ad in the Business Opportunities section of the Dispatch that read "Own your own Music Store". After many trials and tribulations, I opened my store in August of 1996. Music GO Round is a franchise, operated by the same parent company that also franchises Play It Again Sports and Once Upon a Child. I opened my second store in 2000. Today, I have the two stores in central Ohio, and we are doing well.

Jim: How did you become interested in folk music? Do you have any favorite folk artists, groups, or concerts?

Kevin: I have always been a closeted "Folkie." I remember singing "Coo Coo

Cachoo, Mrs. Robinson" when I was a little kid (not knowing the story behind Mrs Robinson). Peter Paul and Mary and Simon and Garfunkel were my go-tos then. My first concert was with my Mom. We saw The Letterman in downtown Columbus somewhere. As I have grown older and learned the guitar and started singing, I became fascinated with the songwriters like Harry Chapin, James Taylor, and Jim Croce. Today, I will spend an evening "deep diving" on YouTube with John Prine, Nancy Griffith, Townes Van Zandt and even Carole King. Recently, I try to attend all the tapings of Songs at the Center. These are fantastic concerts! Some of those artists are so sincere and vulnerable when they are interviewed. It's inspiring. I plan on writing MY "Cat's in the Cradle" someday and seeing/feeling the connection with the audience when I perform it.

Jim: How did you first hear about the Columbus Folk Music Society? How did you go from hearing about it to wanting to be more a part of it?

Kevin: I first heard about the Folk Music Society when I talked to Bill Cohen as he was hanging a flyer in my store 10 years ago. I watched from a distance for many years and decided to poke my head in the door about 5 years ago. I have really enjoyed getting involved and sharing in the appreciation of the artists we get to see at sponsored events. I even got to perform at

one! I feel like I have found "My People" for the next chapter of my life as I approach retirement. They are always so welcoming.

Jim: How did that come to be a multi-instrumentalist? Do you have a favorite instrument?

Kevin: My piano is my main gig, but I learned classically. This means that I have to play every note and every "Pianississimo" in the piece perfectly, else it's simply not good enough. I find that I stress myself out. I picked up the guitar myself, reading the chord boxes in piano music. I enjoy guitar most for this reason. I am pretty sloppy in my playing, but I am not so OCD about the notes, and can dig into the lyrics and meaning behind the words. It is so much more fulfilling to me at this stage in life.

Jim: Jan Flory mentioned to me that in the past at the Central Ohio Folk Festival you've helped out musicians who have had technical issues, can you talk about your experience at COFF?

Kevin: I began my work with the COFF by having a table in the retail tent. I always brought strings and things so that I could "patch up" anybody's instrument, so that they could get the most out of the day of jamming with other musicians. I later realized that while I was in the tent, everybody else was having all the fun playing and attending performances. Last year I was the "on call" repair tech and got to partake of the entire event.

Jim: Do you have any particular interests as far as your participation on the board?

Kevin: I hope to contribute in ways that help it grow while maintaining the

welcoming atmosphere. It's so cool to see families with kids wandering around listening, or making a box drum, or just lounging in the middle of the field taking in the scene. Growth for the sake of growth isn't on my mind.

Jim: What are your impressions of the people you've met so far in the local folk music community/CFMS?

Kevin: Everyone I have worked with is welcoming and genuine. Folk music is this gang's way of reaching out and being a part of the positiveness that sometimes gets lost in today's society. I am honored to be on the board.



Photo Courtesy of Kevin Johnson

“ I have always been a closeted "Folkie" ... singing 'Coo Coo Cachoo, Mrs. Robinson' when I was a little kid. ”

-Kevin Jonnson

Cold Chocolate, from pg 3

"Push & Shove" from our album "DUO" is another that I feel is very representative of the growth of our band. This song began as a fast bluegrass song, driven by our original banjo player, James McIver. After James left the band in 2014 to pursue a career in science in Hamburg, Germany, a lot of the music that we wrote and performed with him fell to the wayside. In 2019, he came back to the states to visit, and one late night, we decided to play Push & Shove. But because James hadn't played banjo in as long as he'd been abroad, he jokingly asked to play it at half speed. We did just that, and in a moment, a brand new song grew from the roots of that 10-year-old song. Originally, it was a fast song, so it was a bluegrass song. Now it's a slow song, so it's a country song. And I think that concept of allowing the music to become whatever it will become is what makes Cold Chocolate the band that it is.

CFMS Social Media Member Use Policy

Did you know that CFMS members who perform locally can request that their events be published on our social media channels (Facebook and Instagram)? This is for member events only and is at the discretion of our Publicity committee.

If you have an event you'd like posted, email a short description and graphic image, or an electronic flyer, to publicity@columbusfolkmusicsociety.org.

Please do not post about other local events when commenting on CFMS-sponsored event posts - these comments will be removed by social media admin.

2025 Kirby Music Scholarship Is Open

Since 2010, the Columbus Folk Music Society (CFMS) has awarded 36 students the Kirby Music Scholarship Award. A number of the winners have been beginners, with no experience, while others have been quite accomplished musicians! Often one can see the current and past winners perform at the Central Ohio Folk Festival.

CFMS established The Kirby Award to honor the memory of Bob Kirby, who was an active member of CFMS. Bob supported folk music in central Ohio and believed in preserving musical traditions.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- *Open to all students in grades 3 - 12
- *Submit a letter explaining your interest in music, your musical goals, what musical instrument you are interested in playing (or play) and if you sing.
- *The committee will interview the top 5 applicants.
- *Download the application form at www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/html

THIS AWARD INCLUDES

- * Free household admission to, and \$40 for meals at, the Central Ohio Folk Festival 2025 on May 3 - 4 at Highbanks Metro Park and an opportunity to perform there (not required)
- *\$500 award to be used toward music, such as the purchase of an instrument or private lessons, etc.
- * One-year free subscription to the CFMS newsletter, "A Different Strummer"



William K Brown

...and Welcome Back RENEWING Members!



Americana/Folk Concert Series

Cold Chocolate

Sunday, March 30, 2:30pm

Doors open at 1:30

Tickets may be pre-purchased at
<https://www.showclix.com/tickets/cold-chocolate-h4gise9>

Venue: Natalie's, 945 King Avenue,
Grandview

Zoom Jam Sessions

Mondays and **Thursdays**

10am -12 noon. Please contact Jane
for more information:

vanaukj@gmail.com

In-Person Jams

Mondays 6-8pm. 4th Avenue

Christian Church, 296 W. 4th Ave

Wednesdays 6:30-8:30pm. Gillie

Center, 2100 Morse Road

Saturdays 9:30-11:30am.

Whetstone Community Center,

3923 N. High St. Register at front

desk for free "Music Jamming with
Others" class. Contact Jane for

other Saturday locations at

vanaukj@gmail.com

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Hold May 3 & 4 for the Central Ohio Folk Festival!

Mark your calendars for May 3 & 4 for this year's
festival! To be staged again at Highbanks Metro
Park, find more information here.

www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/festival.html

Looking for opportunities to play (music) nicely with others? Join the Cbus Jammers!

The Cbus Jammers meet several times a week, in
person and via Zoom to jam together. These
informal sessions are a great opportunity to
practice your instrument while getting to know
some fellow folk music lovers. We also
sometimes play at farm markets, metro parks,
nursing homes, children's events, etc. All folk
instrument players are welcome, regardless of
skill or experience!

To learn more, check the CFMS website:

www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/jam-sessions.html

For questions, to schedule a session, or to be
added to the jam list, contact Jane VanAuken at:
vanaukj@gmail.com.



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BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COLUMBUS FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY

Date _____ New Renew Preferred Newsletter Format: Digital Hard Copy **[NOTE: if you choose hard copy, we request an additional \$15 contribution over & above dues to cover postage & handling]**

Name(s) / Band Name (if applic) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

General Age Range – Born: 1930s-40s 1950s-60s 1970s-80s 1990s-2010s

Phone _____ (Cell) _____ If Band, website _____

E-mail Address _____ Additional e-mail (if a household or band) _____

We are also a growing, vibrant community of volunteers; the awesome force behind our work! Please at least 1 box.

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> May folk festival | <input type="checkbox"/> General Help | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CFMS concert events | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Musician | <input type="checkbox"/> Web Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking / Baking | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing / Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal | Instruments: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> Musician | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity | <input type="checkbox"/> None |

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE ANNUALLY ON DECEMBER 31. one of the membership levels listed below.

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Band \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Silver \$250 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Household \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Good Friend \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$200 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$500 |

I have included an additional \$15 (postage & handling) to have a printed version of newsletter mailed to me.

To join/renew by credit card, visit CFMS' website: columbusfolkmusicsociety.org (About Us/Join)

OR click here: <https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-Join>

To join/renew by cash or check, please mail completed membership form with payment to: Columbus Folk Music Society, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220. Membership amounts may be tax-deductible.

My place of work matches donations:

