

Bob Cox Picks Some of His Favorites

For the New Year Essential Listening checked in with a long-time SD Bluegrass Society member, Bob Cox who now lives in Hawaii. You might remember Bob from one of his bands or from the Thursday Night Pickers jam he and his wife Karen hosted for many years at Today's Pizza in North County. He had a major influence on many players in the San Diego area, and is still a huge supporter of SDBS. Here's what Bob had to say:

What was one of your first influences in bluegrass music?

My first major influence was banjo player Earl Scruggs. As a youngster, I had heard Earl's recordings of *The Ballad of Jed Clampett* (Beverly Hillbillies), and also *Foggy Mountain Breakdown* in the film *Bonnie and Clyde*. I was totally amazed at Earl's banjo picking and wanted to learn that style of bluegrass banjo picking. In the 1960's, there were limited resources available for learning the Scruggs sound. So I went out and bought a Flatt and Scruggs album (*Foggy Mountain Banjo*). I slowed the record down to a snail's pace to analyze the individual notes, understand the three finger picking technique and learn Earl's banjo picking sound.

The first song that I worked on from the *Foggy Mountain Banjo* record was *Cripple Creek*. After a few weeks of wearing out that record, I was able to come up with something real close to what Earl was doing on his banjo picking on *Cripple Creek*. Then I learned *Fireball Mail* from the same record. At that point I was really hooked on learning Earl's style and was practicing a few hours each day. In 1968, Earl made it a lot easier for us banjo players to learn his style when he published his book "Earl Scruggs and the 5 String Banjo"

***Foggy Mountain Banjo* album, Flatt & Scruggs – https://youtu.be/69N5YeuAh_c**

Who is a recent influence?

Recently, I have been working a lot on my fiddling. The late Byron Berline is an important influence for me on the fiddle. I was first introduced to Byron by his work with *The Dillards* on the album *Pickin' and Fiddlin'*. One of my recent fiddle favorites that I have learned is Byron's *Hamilton County Breakdown*. Also, I am totally amazed at the fantastic musicianship of the current generation of bluegrass musicians such as Sierra Hull and Justin Moses.

***Hamilton County Breakdown*, Byron Berline – <https://youtu.be/BWU66--jQ3k>**

Can you recommend an essential recording that bluegrass musicians should hear?

Years have gone by and I continue to listen to John Hartford. John was a great entertainer, songwriter, banjo player and fiddler. John's work on the *Steam Powered Aereoplane* record was one of the driving factors in the development of the "NewGrass" sound.

***Steam Powered Aereoplane*, John Hartford, Vassar Clements, Tony Rice, Jerry Douglas, more...
<https://youtu.be/rN0iOkMNZqQ>**

For a beginning bluegrass musician, whose music would be a good start for learning?

When I taught my "Bluegrass Music for Fun" course for over 30 years, I recommended that the students listen to early Flatt and Scruggs recordings, and also recordings of Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys. These artists were the roots of bluegrass music. Understanding the roots of bluegrass is fundamental to developing as a bluegrass musician. After understanding the roots, one would then be able to branch out and develop their own unique bluegrass style. A great resource is *Flatt and Scruggs, Complete Mercury Recordings*. The record includes the classics *We'll Meet Again Sweetheart* and *Baby Blue Eyes*.

***We'll Meet Again Sweetheart*, Flatt & Scruggs – <https://youtu.be/xtRO126a74A>**

As a musician, whose music are you listening to most?

Currently I have been listening to a lot from the late Dennis Caplinger, the banjo player with *Bluegrass Etc*. Dennis was perhaps one of the best instrumentalists that I have ever heard in my life. Dennis could play all the instruments at an incredibly high level of expertise. Dennis totally amazed me with his plectrum banjo sound that he could obtain from his 5-string banjo. Dennis told me that he developed the

plectrum banjo sound to satisfy music producers who wanted a Dixieland banjo sound, rather than a Bluegrass Banjo sound, on recordings. Dennis' banjo playing on *Bye Bye Blues* is absolutely astounding.

Bye Bye Blues, Dennis Caplinger, John Moore – <https://youtu.be/3GseTtlrQ8>

Who do you recommend for listening for the best (pick one: instrumental, vocal, band sound)?

The Del McCoury Band is spot on for the overall bluegrass band sound. The band displays expert instrumentation blended with Del's incredible singing and the harmonies are wonderful! One of my favorites from Del is *I Feel the Blues Moving In*.

I Feel the Blues Moving In, Del McCoury Band – <https://youtu.be/h2ElvzEX2Hg>

What's an obscure band or recording that you feel is an essential listen?

I recently re-discovered the Allen Lilly Band with Harley Allen and Mike Lilly. Harley was a great singer-songwriter and Mike Lilly was extremely proficient on his unique style of the banjo. Harley Allen, son of Red Allen, wrote the song *Suzanne* which was recently featured on the *Industrial Strength Bluegrass* album. As a side note, a superb history of Bluegrass from Southwest Ohio can be read in the book "Industrial Strength Bluegrass".

Suzanne, Allen Lilly Band – https://youtu.be/f_pUEaLtCpo

What new songs or bands have you been listening to recently?

Lately I have been listening to a young, relatively new bluegrass band from Missouri called The Baker Family. The Baker Family was recently featured on the RFD-TV show called Bluegrass Trail. This young bluegrass band has won countless awards for their hard driving bluegrass sound. One of my favorite songs from the Baker Family is *Whitehouse Blues*.

Whitehouse Blues, Baker Family – https://youtu.be/9Ov6_hXY0QE