

## Women in Bluegrass

As promised, this month we look into women in bluegrass, and who have been important influences for others. And March is Women's History Month!

Sadly, women have not always had the appreciation they deserve for the roles they've played in the largely male-dominated bluegrass world. Sally Ann Forrester was probably one of earliest female members of a bluegrass band when she played accordion with an early lineup of Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys. Mother Maybelle Carter was an inspiration for many female musicians, but came more from the folk/country realm. Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard in the 1960s carried a lot of weight in the bluegrass world, but still weren't ever the big stars that they should have been. The same goes for Ola Belle Reed and Rose Maddox. The Stoneman Family, with daughters Roni on banjo, Donna on mandolin, and Patsy on autoharp were stars of the country/bluegrass world on the Grand Ole Opry and later Hee Haw. Here's an interview with them: <https://youtu.be/3H2PyUk7e4E>

Even in the 1980s when Alison Krauss was signed for her first record on Rounder Records, owner Ken Irwin said in a 1991 article in Bluegrass Unlimited that: "The bluegrass community was slow to appreciate women vocalists then. In fact, we still get occasional cards from someone who says: 'Women can't sing bluegrass.'" (read more at <https://www.bluegrassunlimited.com/article/alison-krauss-and-union-station/>). Emmy Lou Harris spanned the country and bluegrass genres. Allison Brown, Rhonda Vincent, Claire Lynch, Murphy Henry, Lynn Morris, Laurie Lewis, Missy Raines, Dale Ann Bradley, and more that we can name here have had long careers. More recently all-star, all-women bands like Della Mae are rocking the bluegrass world ([https://youtu.be/RPG3APT\\_xWU](https://youtu.be/RPG3APT_xWU)), along with stellar performers like Molly Tuttle, Rhiannon Giddens, Kristin Scott Benson, Sierra Hull, Sara Watkins, and many more.

Who are some of the women that inspired some of today's women in bluegrass? The question that went out to the group was:

***Can you name a female musician who was one of your earliest bluegrass influences (include a song or album please)?***

Here are the responses with short comments from each person:

Nancy Wyatt (SDBS board): **Alison Krauss – *Two Highways***

<https://youtu.be/ljjQ7MnwrvQ> (with Allison Brown)

I have always loved Alison Krauss, she plays the fiddle and plays with mostly all male bands. Her voice is so versatile and to me she represents the best in female musicians, a class act.

Janet Beazley: **Lynn Morris – *It Rains Everywhere I Go (Mama's Hand album)***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co0K0quZ\\_3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co0K0quZ_3Y)

Tricky to narrow it down to only one,

Ramona Ault: **Lynn Morris – *If Teardrops Were Pennies***

<https://youtu.be/gDsgBGtGKmU>

That was the first bluegrass song I learned how to sing and play on guitar.

Mary Jane Cupp (SDBS past pres.): **Rhonda Vincent – *I'm Leaving***

<https://youtu.be/7w9hUH45C1o>

I love her voice, her dynamics, and she's such a great entertainer. I have many of her albums, but I would say that one I have especially enjoyed is "Good Thing Going"

Lisa Burns: **Laurie Lewis – *Restless Rambling Heart*** album

Here's ***Bowling Green*** from that album - <https://youtu.be/orq7eD8QK6E>

I love how she combines Folk (my first love) with Bluegrass

Jo Ellen Doering: **Roni Stoneman – *Big Ball's in Cowtown/Groundhog***

[https://youtu.be/iSZy90ST\\_LM](https://youtu.be/iSZy90ST_LM)

Wow. She could sure play the banjo. I heard The Stoneman Family perform at the Ash Grove before the TV show Hee Haw started.

Lindsay Lou: **Alison Krauss – *You Say It Best***

<https://youtu.be/22lsYW7hzaU>

probably one of my first gateways to women in bluegrass

Elizabeth Loring (former SDBS Pres.): **Jan Harvey/Wild & Blue – *I'll Sit Alone***

<https://soundcloud.com/wildblueofficial/ill-sit-alone>

She was the first woman I heard sing bluegrass and she doesn't get a lot of attention. We watched her and the young Alison Krauss going from jam to jam singing trios with all the guys, and that was the moment I said, "THIS is what I want to do."

**More listening:** bluegrass pioneers Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard:

<https://folkways.si.edu/hazel-dickens-and-alice-gerrard/pioneering-women-of-bluegrass/music/album/smithsonian>

**Further reading/viewing:**

***Pretty Good for a Girl: Women in Bluegrass*** by Murphy Henry, available on Amazon

*The 50 Greatest Bluegrass Albums Made by Women* – Bluegrass Situation Room

<https://thebluegrasssituation.com/read/the-50-greatest-bluegrass-albums-made-by-women/>