

WAYNE RICE

This month *Essential Listening* asked San Diego's own Wayne Rice, (noted banjo player, radio host, and educator) about his thoughts on the best of bluegrass music. Wayne was the host of "The Bluegrass Special" radio show on KSON for 45 years (1976-2020) and now on Mountain Country 107.9 from 4-7pm on Sundays (listen online at themountainfm.com or most radio apps). Wayne's bands have included Lighthouse (1990-2015), Pacific-ly Bluegrass (1978-1990), and Brush Arbor (1970-1974). He is the former co-producer of the IBMA's annual Bluegrass Music Awards Show (2001-2007), and was the recipient of the IBMA's Distinguished Achievement Award in 2020. Wayne has also had a long a career in youth and family ministry, and has been happily married to his lovely spouse Marci for 58 years now. Wayne and Marci now live in Alpine, California.

The *Essential Listening* staff dug deep into youTube and found a number of recordings of Wayne Rice's bands:

Brush Arbor on the Johnny Cash Show (1973)

<https://youtu.be/YrqsVZLiSkU?si=QkhMb7OJppaKG9gx>

Brush Arbor Meeting – Brush Arbor (Capitol Records 1973)

https://youtu.be/-X0d-gF4Bos?si=q4C4FmleD1O_ceMe

Fox on the Run – Pacific-ly Bluegrass "Second Album"

https://youtu.be/4doblxl0nhA?si=8a8FMaV_VYflcb3b

Follow the Light – Lighthouse (live 2010)

<https://youtu.be/8UqOVBbR2lY?si=3kgvB7g0c3cqj968>

What was one of your early influences in bluegrass music?

My biggest influence musically has been without a doubt *The Dillards* – their "Back Porch Bluegrass" and "Live ... Almost" albums, followed by "Wheatstraw Suite" and "Copperfields." I was into folk music in the mid-sixties (Kingston Trio/Brothers Four) but when I heard the Dillards, I was smitten. My brothers Jim and Joe, Marci, and I formed a bluegrass band called *The Rice Kryspies* and we did nothing but Dillards material. We not only stole their songs but a lot of their stage show. It's embarrassing now when I think about it but fortunately we later became friends and all was forgiven.

Sugar Coated – The Rice Kryspies (full album 1969)

https://youtu.be/c6Lh1E7DXQ?si=tY1xZ4RT_cDU0S-S

Who is a recent influence?

Well when you're my age, "recent" is a relative term. About 30 years ago I got totally hooked on Del McCoury. (*Essential Listening*: There's lots of Del McCoury on youtube! Do a search for it and go down that rabbit hole.)

High on a Mountain – Del McCoury Band

https://youtu.be/2u8vjTqCdtc?si=iGJ6xaXh8SqhaC_W

Can you recommend an essential recording that you feel bluegrass/Americana musicians and fans should hear? What makes it essential?

The first album (self-titled) by J.D. Crowe and the New South (Rounder 0044 as it is known) is probably the one that all bluegrass pickers and fans should have in their collection. It represents the changing of the guard—the bridge between first and second generation bluegrass. It was recorded in 1975 and it influenced pretty much everything that came after it. The band – Crowe, Tony Rice, Ricky Skaggs, Bobby Slone and Jerry Douglas – set an incredibly high bar which remains in place. This album was recently chosen by the Library of Congress to be preserved into perpetuity as “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.”

J. D. Crowe and the New South (full album)

<https://youtu.be/LXA3UGcbZFI?si=EWAE5stMD4nReQEz>

Another album that I would recommend would be the first “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” album by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (three vinyl records when it first came out) which included Earl Scruggs, Mother Maybelle Carter, Jimmy Martin, Roy Acuff, Doc Watson and the list goes on. Particularly memorable and interesting is the chatter between the artists as they were recording the sessions.

Will the Circle Be Unbroken - Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (full album)

<https://youtu.be/MvhoseYhhtc?si=IM52RB8Qj-nEFHG3>

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

Of course the place to start is at the start – Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs, the Stanley Brothers. If you are interested in the banjo, then get “Foggy Mountain Banjo” by Flatt & Scruggs. It doesn’t get any better than that. More recently, I would suggest anything by *The Bluegrass Album Band* – J.D. Crowe, Tony Rice, Doyle Lawson, Jerry Douglas, Todd Phillips and Bobby Hicks.

Foggy Mountain Banjo - Flatt & Scruggs (full album)

https://youtu.be/69N5YeuAh_c?si=LLUt9hc97kTG8pFb

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

I’m not really a musician anymore, but I still listen to the Dillards. I also listen to the *New Grass Revival*, *The Desert Rose Band*, *Alison Krauss*, *The Isaacs*, *Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver* and classic country – Buck Owens, Merle Haggard, Don Williams, Vern Gosdin, etc.

(*Essential Listening*: Too many to link them all here. You can just do a quick search yourself for ANY of these great artists on YouTube for hours of listening.)

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

A band that never got enough love from the bluegrass community in my opinion: *Crucial Smith* (1997-2003). Their banjo player Chris Joslin is now the executive director of the Bluegrass Hall of Fame and Museum in Owensboro, Kentucky. First time I heard their album "Morning Light," I was completely blown away. I had a chance to see them perform live at the IBMA World of Bluegrass back in the late '90's and became an even bigger fan. Sadly, they broke up just a few years later.

Morning Light – *Crucial Smith* (full album)

https://youtu.be/1p_Gkw03eb8?si=VLZ7sBcCqPaHJ5nZ

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

There are some extremely talented new artists in bluegrass music these days. I play a lot of new music on my radio show which is now on Mountain Country 107.9 (Alpine). Billy Strings, Molly Tuttle, the Wood Box Heroes, Mighty Poplar, the Kody Norris Show, Caroline Owens, Dalton Harper – these are just a few. There is definitely a changing of the guard happening now that will lead us into an exciting new era of bluegrass music.

EP Live – *The Wood Box Heroes* (five song EP)

https://youtu.be/ObH0Z8Xwxhw?si=3luDSPz67iIRxQ_q

Up on the Divide – *Mighty Poplar*

<https://youtu.be/IF6Dg3LiiL0?si=YrTyt53BV2h0wd7G>

Heartbreak Train – *Caroline Owens*

https://youtu.be/2z3bahhsOrM?si=F7cd7qOS9G9_Yx9g

Coming Home – *Dalton Harper*

<https://youtu.be/kXyBTI-cyEQ?si=SuLd6WZV-snagrNc>

Many thanks, Wayne, for your great comments, and for all of your fantastic contributions to bluegrass music.