



## MUSIC FROM THE CROOKED ROAD MOUNTAIN MUSIC OF VIRGINIA

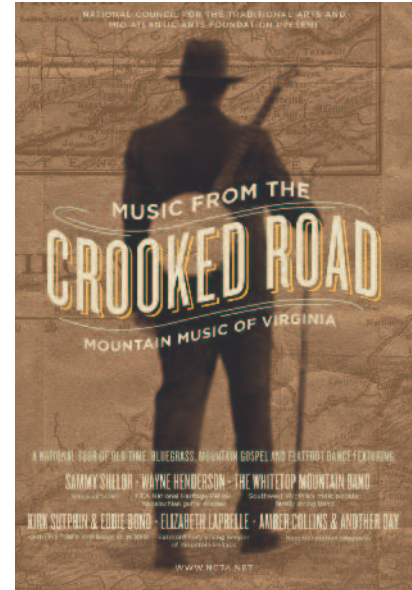
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P A G E

1

### A National Tour of Old-time, Bluegrass, Mountain Gospel and Flatfoot Dance

The *Music From the Crooked Road* tour celebrates the vibrant, living musical culture of Southwest Virginia where making music is, and always has been, an integral part of life. The tour features: NEA National Heritage Award Fellow and Appalachian guitar master Wayne Henderson, bluegrass banjo virtuoso Sammy Shelor, family old-time string band The White Top Mountain Band, old-time fiddle and banjo masters Kirk Sutphin and Eddie Bond and, representing the next generation of Blue Ridge musicians, the up-and-coming bluegrass band Amber Collins and Another Day, and a young keeper of ancient mountain ballads and songs, 21-year-old Elizabeth LaPrelle.



Winding for over 200 miles across the mountains, ridges and valleys of southwestern Virginia from the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge to the coalfields, the Crooked Road (Hwy. 58) passes through some of the most musical places on earth. For generations, the tiny rural Appalachian communities scattered along its length have produced an abundance of extraordinary traditional musicians. Keepers of an historic musical legacy with roots in the meeting of the African banjo and the European violin during colonial times, they have created and passed on old-time, bluegrass and mountain gospel sounds that have profoundly influenced the development of American music.

The outstanding artists appearing on this tour link the past, present and future of deeply rooted American traditions. They represent the thousands of area musicians, singers and dancers who love their home grown music, and make it every day in family kitchens, workshops, jam sessions at the local Dairy Queen, community dances, sings and musical gatherings of every conceivable variety.

### ABOUT THE ARTISTS

#### Wayne Henderson

Wayne Henderson is the Appalachian guitarist the Nashville pickers talk about, the one who lives in a very remote area of the Blue Ridge and makes those

acoustic guitars with the amazing tone, the ones that are so hard to get. Sometimes Wayne's playing is mistaken for flat-picking but actually he uses a thumb pick and fingerpicks to achieve amazing speed and fluidity, transforming fiddle and banjo pieces and even the occasional jazz standard into stunning guitar solos.

Henderson was born, raised and still lives in tiny Rugby, Virginia, population seven, in Grayson County near the North Carolina border. His father and uncle were musicians who for a time played in the string band of Estil Ball, a renowned guitarist in the area. Wayne admired Mr. Ball's music and was impressed by his guitar, a steel-string Martin. Wayne wanted to play guitar, but he couldn't afford a Martin, so he ordered one from the Sears catalogue. The mail-order instrument was a sad disappointment, one that helped launch him on his career as a guitar maker. Wayne Henderson built his first guitar using traced patterns and the wood from the bottom of a dresser drawer. More than two hundred guitars later, Henderson is considered one of the most extraordinary instrument makers in the world. He learned much of what he knows from the legendary Albert Hash, instrument maker and old-time musician who lived a few miles away and who was respected widely for the superior quality of his work and for his generous encouragement of aspiring young instrument makers. Most luthiers with national reputations give instruments to famous players in return for



endorsements, but Wayne never has. Eric Clapton waited seven years for a Henderson guitar, because, as Wayne reasoned, “Well, he’s already got plenty of nice ones to play.” The story is chronicled in the recent book by *Wall Street Journal* writer Allen St. John entitled *Clapton’s Guitar: Watching*

*Wayne Henderson Build the Perfect Instrument.*

Henderson’s shop is, and has always been, more than a place of work and business. It is a place where the Rugby community comes together to share knowledge, music, and most importantly, time. Henderson recently retired from his job as a U.S. Postal carrier and now has more time to devote to playing and instrument making. In 1995 he received the National Endowment for the Arts’ National Heritage Fellowship, the nation’s greatest honor for those who practice traditional arts. He has performed throughout the United States and the world, has taken first place 13 times in the Galax Fiddlers’ Convention guitar competition, and is honored annually by friends and neighbors at the Wayne C. Henderson Music Festival and Guitar Competition, held in Grayson Highlands State Park.

**Sammy Shelor**

Some fans of the banjo will tell you that this brilliant musician is the bluegrass banjoist of our time, the player who best combines the riches of tradition with striking innovation. Sammy Shelor is from Meadows of Dan, a small but beautiful place in Patrick County at the eastern end of the Crooked Road. He is the leader of the Lonesome River Band, long considered one of the finest bluegrass bands in the country, but will be participating in the tour as a soloist.

Sammy’s mountain musical pedigree runs deep. Nine families have dominated Patrick County music for two hundred years. The Shelors are one of these families, and Sammy is also related to several others. Family members recorded for Victor in the famed Bristol, Tennessee sessions in 1927 (the same sessions



that made stars of Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family), and their recordings, under various names, from these sessions are now famous.

A prodigy, Sammy was taken with his banjo at age six to play tunes with great-aunt Clarice Shelor who recorded with Dad

Blackard’s Moonshiners in the Bristol sessions. Sammy recalls that Aunt Clarice, an old-time pianist, could rock the house with her left hand. That’s what Sammy does with his banjo: he rocks the house with a sense of timing that reminds us that the banjo is, after all, a drum with strings, a percussion instrument with a four hundred year history, well kept in the Blue Ridge, but with roots in West Africa.

**The Whitetop Mountain Band**

Emily and Thornton Spencer have been leaders of this legendary old-time stringband from Grayson County for over twenty years. Famous among dancers for its unerring rhythms, Whitetop is the most celebrated stringband in the Blue Ridge. Founded by the late Albert Hash, beloved luthier, violinmaker, fiddler and friend of all, Whitetop has always performed the music of western Grayson County. This is the area where Virginia’s two highest mountains, Whitetop and Mt. Rogers, are located.



Grayson County has been a spawning ground for old-time musicians for the better part of a century. But the two ends of Grayson do not sound the same. The players near the peaks in western Grayson do not sound like those from the Galax /Mt. Airy area. That old-time sound, sometimes called “Round Peak,” may have been adopted in Long Island, Tokyo, and the West Coast, but it did not reach western Grayson County. Its tiny mountain towns have their own unique sound, and the small but intensely musical Whitetop community is a careful keeper of this music. At the heart of this scene is the Spencer family of the Whitetop Mountain Band and the school stringband program run by matriarch Emily Spencer.

When educators decided that the tiny school at Mt. Rogers with its 88 students in grades K thru 13 was too small for a brass band instructor, local musicians were appalled. So, volunteers created a string band program. Its founder, Albert Hash, passed away many years ago, but out of his passing, the school formed the nationally recognized *Albert Hash Memorial Stringband*. While most high school bands elsewhere concentrate on brass band music suitable for football games, kids in Whitetop learn the *Devil’s Dream*, *Cluck O’ Hen*, *Cumberland Gap*, and ancient ballads. Their exercise is not from band marching, but from the highly aerobic dancing that is called flat-footing.

Emily Spencer, wife of Albert’s brother in law, Thornton Spencer, has carried on Albert’s music program for over two decades. The Albert Hash

Memorial String Band has become a focal point for the local musical community. The band actually exists in several different incarnations depending on skill level, and functions in an informal atmosphere. Open jam sessions are held in the school gymnasium every Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

With the Spencers, mountain stringband music is also a family affair. Thorton Spencer, the Whitetop Mountain Band's chief fiddler, is noted for his rich tone, deep local repertoire, and soulful qualities. Emily credits her unique clawhammer banjo style and flawless rhythms that drive the band to a long-departed neighbor, Jont Belvins. Their amazing daughter Martha moves effortlessly between singing, flatfoot dancing, and playing guitar, fiddle, bass or banjo. The Whitetop Band is a living testimony to the vitality and deep roots of traditional music in south western Virginia.

### **Kirk Sutphin and Eddie Bond**



A master old-time fiddler and banjoist, Kirk Sutphin performs the Round Peak style long identified with the Galax/Mt. Airy area on the Virginia-North Carolina border. Thousands of others perform in this pre-bluegrass style, but Kirk differs in the razor edge of quality he brings to his performance. He also differs

in that he comes from within the tradition. His grandfather, a fiddler and banjoist, was from Round Peak. Famed fiddler Tommy Jarrell, also from Round Peak, spent much time teaching tunes to a young Kirk. Sutphin is a master of the pure Round Peak style on both fiddle and clawhammer banjo. The banjo style of this area is highly developed, and Kirk's smooth and seemingly effortless technique is especially evident when he plays the fretless banjo. He also has a rich knowledge of other historic banjo styles from the Blue Ridge and Piedmont. Kirk toured the nation twice with the NCTA's *Masters of the Banjo* tour, and became the favorite old-time banjoist of another participant, Ralph Stanley. He has performed at a number of major U.S. festivals. Kirk is housepainter by profession.

Sutphin's frequent musical partner is fiddler, singer and banjoist Eddie Bond from Fries, a Grayson County village of 600 just north of the Crooked Road that was built around a now-disappeared cotton mill on the headwaters of the New River. That cotton mill produced four of the high-flying bands of the twenties; bands that helped invent country music with recordings on major labels and through radio broadcasting. Eddie plays in the forceful rhythmic dance style from the Galax/Mt. Airy area that captivated the nation in the

1960s. He learned directly from legendary masters Tommy Jarrell, Fred Cockerham, and Kyle Creed, and other great musicians who did not record. Like many of the older masters fiddlers from whom he learned, he is also a fine performer in the older clawhammer banjo style of the region, as well as a talented singer. Eddie plays at many dances in the region and is a frequent winner in the area's many traditional fiddle and banjo competitions. A dynamic performer, he brings flair and a sense of humor to the music that engages audiences and delights musicians. Eddie is known for his powerful voice, and is often found singing and fiddling at the local Wednesday night jam session at the New River Café in Fries.

### **Amber Collins and Another Day**

A product of the region's enduring musical legacy, this exciting young bluegrass band represents the next generation of fine Southwest Virginia musicians.

The members of Amber Collins and Another Day live between Cana and Saltville, Virginia along the hazy blue vistas of the Crooked Road as it crosses the Blue Ridge.

At the center of this new band are Amber Collins and Josh Pickett, who were bandmates in the important young regional band "No Speed Limit" that attracted considerable attention before parting ways in the fall of 2008. Subsequently, dynamic young lead singer Amber Collins, age 20, of Saltville has put together an all-star group poised to break onto the national stage. Collins possesses a powerful, resonant voice and distinctive style. A singer who started at age two, Amber brings 18 years of experience to her craft. Her tastes are broad-ranging. She has sung gospel for years, likes a portion of country, and adores bluegrass. Those who hear her instantly know they are hearing a part of the future.

Josh Pickett of Cana brings an arsenal of explosive runs to guitar backup, and as a soloist or "turn-around" man, is among the most exciting and inventive young flatpickers this guitar-rich area has produced. He started playing at the age of 11 and at the age of 17 won the International Guitar Championship at Merlefest; he's the youngest person ever to hold this title. In addition to his work with Another Day, Josh teaches music to over 50 young students a week.

Champion banjo player and instrument maker Jody King of Ararat brings a rich musical resume to the group, including prior work with Lost and Found, After Five and the Jeanette Williams Band. Ronald Inscore, formerly of the Kenny



and Amanda Smith Band, holds forth on mandolin and contributes baritone vocals. Completing the group is Alyssa Emerson, age 19, on rhythm and lead guitar as well as lead and harmony vocals. A powerful singer and songwriter, she also recently took first prize on guitar at the Galax Old-Time Fiddlers Convention.

Amber Collins and Another Day perform new songs they have composed, as well as the honored classics of bluegrass. They imbue all of this music with great energy, and enjoy their performances as much as the audience. You may not have heard of this young band, but they perform with a fire and élan that assures you soon will.

### **Elizabeth LaPrelle**

Twenty-one-year-old college student Elizabeth LaPrelle is exceptional in her devotion to and mastery of the ancient and deep art of Appalachian unaccompanied singing. She performs the old mountain ballads and

songs with a sense of conviction, honor, honesty and an emotional force that evokes the great Appalachian ballad singers of generations past. Raised in Rural Retreat, Virginia, she came from a home where there was always singing, and a community with many fine old-time musicians. Elizabeth has developed her style and repertoire from neighbors like Jim Lloyd, under the tutelage of powerful female ballad singers Ginny Hawker and Sheila Kay Adams, and from legendary singers like Cas Wallin. Virginia State Folklorist Jon Lohman says of Elizabeth, "One gets the feeling...that she is accessing those aspects of these songs that transcend place and historical time, and speak directly to the heart." Elizabeth's voice, stark and unaccompanied, can lift and carry the listener away to another time.



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**Mounted for the first time in the fall of 2007** in a five-state, 15-city tour of the West Coast, *Music from the Crooked Road: Mountain Music of Virginia* was a resounding artistic, critical and box office success.

In San Diego, the show outsold jazz legend Herbie Hancock and the internationally acclaimed mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves. In Santa Barbara, *Crooked Road* ticket sales were only 100 shy of Bela Fleck's. In Modesto, Santa Cruz, and Santa Barbara, the tour outsold the "Solid Blues" tour with Mavis Staples, Charlie Musselwhite, North Mississippi Allstars, and Joe Krown. Most halls were at or near sellout throughout the tour.

**"It was refreshing to witness the collaboration between the performers and the audience, as we clearly realized we were witnessing something authentic and magical. It was a welcome peek back into Americana's roots, and showed that the spirit lives on, centuries later. To steal a line from the traditional encore, "how sweet the sound."**

- Santa Barbara Independent

**"The audience members whooped, hollered and raised so much ruckus, they could have been at a hootenanny. The musicians responded with a rousing show of more than 40 songs, played on guitars, banjos, fiddles, mandolins and a bass fiddle."**

- The Modesto Bee

## TOUR PACKAGE

*Music from the Crooked Road: Mountain Music of Virginia* package includes all costs for artists, management, travel and accommodations; a state-of-the-art sound system; audio engineers; excellent promotional materials including posters and brochures; and beautifully designed educational program books for free distribution to all students, teachers, and audience members. State-of-the-art production and thoughtful curation help frame the tour program in ways that enhance and deepen the audience experience. The tour will offer outreach programs appropriate for a variety of ages and settings: educational K-12 concerts that have been consistently praised by educators, in-school educational activities, lecture-demonstrations, master classes and workshops, among others. The NCTA works collaboratively with presenting organizations, schools, and community advisors, to create outreach programs customized for each target audience.

## MUSIC FROM THE CROOKED ROAD: MOUNTAIN MUSIC OF VIRGINIA is being offered in the eastern United States in the spring 2010.

For tour availability contact:  
301-565-0654 x15 or 14  
or email at [tours@ncta.net](mailto:tours@ncta.net)  
[www.ncta.net](http://www.ncta.net)

The *Music From the Crooked Road: Mountain Music of Virginia* tour is produced by the National Council for the Traditional Arts, a private not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the presentation and documentation of folk, ethnic and tribal arts in the United States [www.ncta.net](http://www.ncta.net).

Designated an *American Masterpieces* program that represents the best of American cultural heritage and legacy, *Music From the Crooked Road: Mountain Music of Virginia* is presented in partnership with the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF), which is providing limited tour support to performing arts presenters in the region.

## ABOUT THE NCTA

Founded in 1933, the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) is the nation's oldest organization dedicated to folk and traditional arts. Its programs celebrate and honor deeply rooted cultural expressions—music, dance, crafts, and stories—passed down through time by families, communities, tribal, ethnic, and traditional groups. The NCTA began organizing national tours in 1978, work that has been characterized by the same commitment to artistic excellence, authenticity, and education that it brings to all of its programs. NCTA's tours, many of which are now legendary, have traveled to 49 states and performed in hundreds of community centers, school auditoriums, and major concert halls. The NCTA strives both to reach national, general audiences, and to bring traditional arts and artist back home – to the regional, native, immigrant, and ethnic communities that created them. All NCTA tours are conceptual in nature, presenting the finest traditional artists in ways that explore cultural heritage, identity, values, and relationships.

The **Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation** (MAAF) celebrates and supports the wealth and diversity of the region's arts resources and works to make those resources widely accessible both in the mid-Atlantic region and beyond. The Foundation's programs include performing arts touring, jazz presenter training, an artist residency program and regional traditional arts projects. [www.midatlanticarts.org](http://www.midatlanticarts.org)

