

Blue Muse Roots Jam

(updated 7/8/19)

Do your ears perk up when you hear:

Bill Monroe, Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, Rev. Gary Davis, Robert Johnson, Johnny Cash, Big Bill Broonzy, Ralph Stanley, the Carters, Old Crow Medicine Show, Louvin Brothers, Lightnin' Hopkins, Everly Brothers, Del McCoury, Son House, Sam Bush, Memphis Minnie, Delmore Brothers, Tony Rice, Darrell Scott, Muddy, even Neil and Bob?

Then you got a hankerin' and an appreciation for American Roots Music. From the Red, White and Blues to the Red, White and Bluegrass, we've been blessed with musical traditions speaking directly to our lives, joys, trials, victories, losses, and sorrows. These traditions, each unique, but drawing from common threads and inspirations speak directly to the human condition and our need to appreciate and understand all it offers.

Now is the time to step up and do your part to keep these traditions alive. Continuing from where our predecessors left off, Blue Muse Roots Jam will meet monthly to that purpose. If you've been craving the opportunity to meet and play **acoustic music** with others of like inclination this is it! No charge, no tricks or gimmicks, just bring your instrument(s), and your interest. To fully engage the experience, you should be able to play your instrument, especially if you're sitting inside the circle. That said, all skill levels will be welcomed. Customarily, the pilgrims and newbies sit outside the circle until their skills and confidence tell them it's time to move forward. Watch what those old-timers are doing. You'll know soon enough when you're ready to take the plunge.

Guitars, harps, mandolins, banjos fiddles and bass, etc., etc., all will be welcomed, even gazoos and drums (within limits). Curious listeners? All will be welcomed. In line with tradition the door is open to all who have genuine interest. Just step on through. Better yet, dive on in!

These are playing sessions. Don't expect the session to stop because you need learnin' or tutorin'. If you're new to the game, best advice is to pay close attention to what's going on, and see how others are getting on. If you're old to the game, be respectful, and don't snipe or take pot shots at the newbies. Unless they ask you directly, folks generally aren't looking for your publicly expressed opinion on how they play, their interpretation of the song, their take on the lyrics, or their timing. Experienced folks are expected to set the example, and the best example is to push other people up, not down, and to provide a solid platform. Make them look good with your smarts and your fine backing efforts. If you have something you just have to tell them, do it politely and privately.

(There is a moderator ... except for ensuring jam etiquette is followed, he/she will likely stay out of everyone's hair.)

Any questions, email "Billy" at bluemuserootsjam@gmail.com

Dates

Below are the scheduled dates thru Summer 2020. As you all know, our summers are blessed with fine weather and many festivals and that's where most of you will be heading. You can show off all those new licks, skills and tunes you picked up during the year! We will continue these events so long as there remains sufficient interest. Cast your vote, and show your support by showing up.

Only other thing is cancellations due to weather or emergency. Should that happen, check www.bluemuse.org for the latest news, or email me if you have a question or concern.

Likewise, if you want to be on our email list.

We are scheduled to meet monthly, starting September 2019, and running continuously thru June 2020. **Be sure to check the schedule on the next page for specifics.** Any changes to this schedule will be posted here and/or emailed to those who are on our list. Starting time is 1:00 pm. We're usually there at 12:30, so you can come early, socialize, get set up and comfortable. It's even OK to come late, and leave early, if your work or schedule (or spouse, or dog) requires it. There will be a break about midway through each session. That's, so we can get acquainted, and perhaps trade riffs and ideas. The last hour is usually dedicated to exploring new tunes and ideas. We wrap it up around 5:00 pm and use the final few minutes for housekeeping and pack out.

Location

The Grace R. Moore Library (Conference Room)
215 South 56th Street
Tacoma, WA 98408

Third Saturday each month. Only exceptions are January (4th Saturday) and February (5th Saturday). Unless otherwise noted, all sessions will be held at our usual venue, the Moore branch of the Tacoma Library.

Sep 21, 2019

Oct 19, 2019

Nov 16, 2019

Dec 21, 2019

Jan 25, 2020 (4th Saturday)

Feb 29, 2020 (5th Saturday)

Mar 21, 2020

Apr 18, 2020

May 16, 2020

Jun 20, 2020

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Jam Etiquette

(There is a moderator ... except for ensuring jam etiquette is followed, he/she will likely stay out of everyone's hair.)

1. We sit in a circle. The larger the group, the larger the circle, and vice versa. Atmosphere is friendly, and intimate. Focus is musical communication. Don't be shy! Introduce yourself to those around you.
2. Players in the circle determine the songs played, moving clockwise around the circuit. Please

respect that. When it's your turn, call your "tune" so everyone can hear. **Let 'em know what key you want to play it in. If it's gonna be tricky, explain it (see #5 below). Make sure everyone is on board before you pull out.** It can be very distracting to hear people whispering, "What key is he/she in?, or What's the name of the tune?" once you've begun your number .

3. One of the joys (and challenges) of sitting in a circle is the opportunity to step up and take a lead. For the experienced folks, this is no big deal, it's how they perfect improvisation. It's called plunging boldly into the unknown. Sort of like Star Trek. For the less experienced, it can be a daunting leap. Trust us, we're not gonna be funnin' on you. Just give it your best shot. Sometimes you'll go down in flames, sometimes it'll be magic. At all times, you'll get something out of it to make it worth your while. We all get butterflies. They never go away. Learn to appreciate them. The late Jerry Garcia referred to improvisation as "Diving for pearls." There's a reason for that. Sometimes they're there, sometimes they're not. The only secret you need to know about music is to "learn by trying". If there's a disaster, the moderator will call a halt, and we'll start again from the top. Eventually, you'll get it to sound the way you're hearing it in your head.

4. **Leads:** If you're calling the song, take command of the group. See who wants to take a lead before heading out. Eye contact works wonders. If a song has already started and you want in, look to the song caller and nod your head. Shake a polite "no" if you don't. You might also let the person to your left know, to ensure continuity. Oh, and don't forget to modulate your volume, particularly when someone else is singing or playing a lead. For example, if someone is on the other side of the circle singing or taking a lead, back it down so you can hear what they're doing. Be forewarned, courtesy is reciprocated, more so if already extended.

Now friends, I know some of you are just starting out on this journey. No need to be nervous or afraid, we'll support you. If you're too shy to give it a go, pass on to the next person in the circle. Your time will eventually come, and you'll know when you're ready.

5. **Who calls the songs?** If you're an individual sitting in the circle, and playing an instrument, you can call a song. If you come in as a duo, or trio, your pair or group can call one song per rotation. Come prepared, it's smart to have your song list figured out ahead of time. As friends, we're patient, but as a friend, you should be courteous. When it's your turn, take charge, speak up loud and clear, **and in thirty seconds or less**, spell out what you're going to do and tell how you want us to support your effort. Remember, we're not trying to stump each other here. We're all up for new and different adventures, but if you decide to spring one on us take a few moments to talk us through it, provide an overview on the song, spell out the chords (especially if they're off the beaten trail), and describe the layout (verse, chorus, variations).

Never forget, you are there to play American Roots Music. I personally play the Beatles catalogue, as well as Hendrix, and I'm OK with Hip-hop, and even Elton John. For the most part, they're not American Roots Music. **PLEASE**, try to be clear on that, and respect the "Program". Again, if you must challenge us, do your homework, write it up, and pass copies to the group to ensure they're with you. Lastly, if you don't understand what the song caller wants, ask questions. You'll never get foot on that train if you don't even know where it's at. Whatever you do, remember this golden rule of jamming. **"It's doggone impolite to expect everyone in the room is gonna figure out what you're doing when you didn't have the courtesy to bring them in to begin with."** That's a good way to get personally acquainted with the moderator.

6. When your song has run its course, you'll want to signal folks the end is fast approaching. Nothing complicated, a common trick is to kick your foot out as you start the last cycle. You can also just say, "bring it on home folks". If you don't do this, you might just find opportunity to witness what we call a "train wreck". No problem, we'll pick up the pieces and put it back on the track.

7. Always be mindful of jam courtesy. The person who's up is Hamlet. There's no room for two Hamlets on the floor. **There will be plenty of opportunities to chat and chatter, to trade and exchange. Just remember when one of our friends is setting up a number for the group, or performing a song, he or she deserves our undivided attention, and support.** Next to listening, knowing when to be quiet is the highest of jam courtesies. **It is also the one most ignored!**

8. The good folks at Tacoma Public Library support this effort, and we reciprocate. Respect and protect the facility. **Rules prohibit coffee brewing and preparing food on site, the preferred beverage is bottled water or its equivalent. Cookies are fine if you choose to bring (and share) them.** We usually have both on site.

There you have it. Those are the rules which guarantee a quality experience. Not too much to ask, all things considered.

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Incidentals

1. What type of music should I expect to encounter?

For the most part, you will encounter pretty good music.

The character of music you'll encounter on any given Saturday depends a lot on the mix of participants. Our experience from past years tells us you should expect to hear acoustic blues, some bluegrass, some degree of country and western, perhaps an occasional swing tune, an occasional Chicago blues, a dash of Gospel, and every once in a while, something like "Sweet Georgia Brown" or "Five Foot Two" will emerge from the closet. You might also bump into some old time and jug band tunes, a sea chanty or two, and an occasional celtic.

*In a nutshell, **the focus is "American Roots Music."** The attitude is inclusive and recognizes the essential informative value of blues, gospel, bluegrass, folk, early country, cajun, zydeco, western swing, celtic, maybe even reggae. Other stuff, we'll decide after somebody springs it on us.*

If you're a musical purist, and like to concentrate on a singular style or thread to the exclusion of others, you might find our sessions challenging your inclinations. We're not about that. If you like surprises, and the occasional push into the unknown, chances are you'll feel like family.

2. Are we permitted to record?

Yes, these are "public" gatherings. The Blue Muse Roots Jam functions as an incubator, . serving the perpetuation of our unique musical heritage. Experience has shown that next to participating directly, the best learning tool is a recording of what took place, and analyzing your contribution to the whole. Nothing improves your playing as much as self assessment and objective listening.

Recordings of sessions may be freely distributed, they may not be marketed or sold.

3. Can we take photographs?

Yes, unless someone present objects.

Images may be freely distributed so long as this is done in a respectful fashion. They may not be marketed or sold.

4. Can we video the sessions?

Yes, unless someone present objects.

Again, all video recordings of sessions or segments may be freely distributed so long as this is done in a respectful fashion. They may not be marketed or sold.

5. Are there microphones?

There is a PA system on site and a “live” microphone jack. Usually, some of our friends bring a few cables, mikes, and stands, but this is not a certainty. The room we use is “sound friendly” and the voice carries well. We encourage learning to sing with a microphone. That in mind, we make every effort to have two quality mics on the floor at all times.

6. Do the sessions start on time?

Generally they do. You can come early and socialize. If enough are there, we may even start ahead of schedule. Point is, we’re OK goin’ with the flow. Oh and folks will come and go throughout the afternoon. It’s fine to come and go to suit your personal schedule and time parameters. Just make sure we all know your name before you head out. Sooner or later we expect to become friends. Better that it’s sooner, and we work at it.

7. When do the sessions officially end?

Ending time is 5:30 pm. Generally, the music wraps up at 5:00 pm, and we spend the last half hour packing out and picking up. We like to leave the place just like we found it.

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Resources

I like to play out, and to jam, and sometimes even busk. To that end, I have compiled hundreds of songs, as well as written a few of my own. When I get interested in a tune, I will generally look to the original recording for direction, and then I will look to see how others have interpreted it. In my research, YouTube has proven to be a singular resource.

Over time, I eventually arrive at my own take on the tune. Sometimes that means finding the right key for my voice, or modifying the lyrics so they roll off my tongue more smoothly (or in some cases are less violent, or less misogynist, or simply less exclusive). As you can imagine, I have loose leaf binders all over the house, in closets, under coffee tables, under my car seat. You get the picture.

Eventually, after lots and lots of repetitions, and experiments, and sometimes crashes, I come up with a working interpretation, and because I did the work (paid my dues, if you will), I get intimate with the tune and can do it with confidence (well ... sometimes). I have usually also worked out several lead breaks spinning off the underlying chord structure, and inspired by the melodic theme (you'll figure out what that means when you start to doing your own experimenting). Sometimes it happens I can't make the song work for me. We part as friends, but not before I thank it for what it learned me.

To show you what I mean, I've scanned two of my collections. The first is weighted toward Country Blues, but includes some Bluegrass and Gospel. The second is weighted toward Bluegrass, and includes some Blues as a counterpoint. Both have some of my own tunes (yes, they are copyrighted, but I'd consider it a gesture of friendship if you take them out for a spin). Both compilations are continuing works in progress, so you might find it beneficial to check for updates every couple months.

They can be found here under the *Resources* tab at www.bluemuse.org

There's a lot to think about in these compilations ... depending on how serious you are about your chops. At the very least, they'll start you on your path, and point you in the right direction.

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Here are two bluegrass chord compilations which I put together after downloading from some of the jam sites. You can print these out and throw them in your gig bag. Most of the commonly played fiddle or bluegrass tunes can be found in one or the other of these. I've taken care to include index/number references (and key signatures where possible), so finding the tune can be done pretty quickly.

Wanna hear an amazing tale regarding a once obscure and unknown musician, discovered virtually by accident. Click on the image of John Jackson immediately below, and it will take you there. You will not regret it!

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Please respect our intent that the information contained herein is presented for educational use only. While a number of the songs listed are from the Public Domain, there are some which have become jam standards, but may still be protected by copyright. As has been the case throughout our musical history, great songs find their way into traditional music circles, even when they are written by contemporary composers (like Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, Muddy Waters, Gene Autry, Neil Young, Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Joni Mitchell, Willie Nelson, Paul Simon, etc.). A few tunes are untraceable by name, given the limitations of the U.S. Copyright office and available online resources. The inclusion of any of the above tunes in our compilations is not meant to violate, ignore or misuse the protection rightfully due any copyright holder. They appear here for the singular purpose of music education and assisting aspiring musicians following paths laid by others in our unique musical tradition. We will be happy to remove any song from the collection upon request of a confirmed copyright holder.

For those whose skills grow to where you're thinking of recording, performing in public, or going pro, be responsible for researching songs you use and for paying any licensing fees that might apply.