The Allan French Column by Allan French

Nearby Lived a Miner Forty-Niner

There are many neat things to see and do while you're visiting Grass Valley for the Music Camp or the Father's Day Festival. You can learn about mining possibilities at www.GrassValleyChamber.com/ (Navigate to “Visitors & Convention Sites and Museums.”) You can also visit an experienced mineralogical artist and see what are their favorite sides of rock collection.

I would recommend visiting the city of North Bloomfield (home of Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park), northeast of Nevada City. This is almost like a ghost town but doesn’t have the eerie feeling of one. The town’s only residents are the California Park Rangers who give tours and provide security. This was a boomtown during the era of hydraulic mining of 1850-1890. For kids fascinated with oversized SuperSoaker guns, they may get a kick out of the 15-foot water cannon. A half-mile from the “heart of the city” is a one-room schoolhouse and a church. North Bloomfield reminds me of the “Little House on the Prairie” setting – it is very authentic (unlike the “old town” districts in some Old West towns). Guided tours are led by “once” daily at 1:30pm; and I certainly found it worth attending.

A word of caution: Plot a route that minimizes your travel on North Bloomfield Road if possible. It is unpaved and is best suited to 4WD vehicles. Taking the long route may involve more miles but a faster speed. Bring your own food and water with you, as the on-site concessions are meager. While there last year, I picked up the CD, “The Miner’s Dream: Songs of the California Gold Rush.” Soon after listening to it, I decided to add “Clementine” to my banjo repertoire.

The Empire Mine park and the North Star Mine exhibit are both very close by to the Nevada County Fairgrounds. They are on East Empire St and Allison Ranch Rd., respectively. Within a few years, if the state’s Parks Department budget allows it, visitors should be able to go underground into a mine-shaft at The Empire Mine. You can see the Anderson family Bluegrass Band performing at “The Miners’ Picnic” in a photo at the website www.EmpireMine.org.

I Found the “Lost And Found”

Along with my own tips, last month I shared a summary of tips from Melinda Faubel, regarding how to not lose your stuff at a music festival. For those who enjoy reading advice columns, or are friends of Melinda, check out www.BootsAndSaddlesMId.Blogspot.com/; then navigate to June 2010 in the archives section and read “What-I-Learned-In-The–CBA-Booth.” If you’re at FDF while reading this, it’s not too late to grab business cards and a Sharpie pen and start “tagging” everything that you brought with you. Speaking of finding things: While at upcoming festivals and jams, if you find any music related personalized license plates” (or perhaps a clever bumper sticker), feel free to pass on the specific to me at AFrench123[at]comcast[dot]net. If I didn’t cite it already in a column last year, let me know and I’ll add it to the “best” segment that I am planning for August or September.

Family Fun and Fiddle Prodding

Virtually all kids like music, whether they are preschoolers or tweens. Most things may be their tastes may differ MIGHTILY from your own. A bluegrass festival is a safe place to let them grow as musicians and as people. While at FDF, I spoke with Frank Solivan / Regina Bartlett / Sharon Elliott to learn about the “Kids On Bluegrass” program. See Bruce Long to learn about the “Lending Library.” (A free instrument your kid can borrow long-term – what could be better?) Contact info for these people (and many others) appears on the front of this newspaper. Why do I so often mention the events and programs aimed at kids? Maybe because I’m a bit jealous of them. I would have been THRILLED to participate in such activities when I was their age. (At least, that’s what the “adult” in me thinks.)

Do you know a youngster that needs prodding? Your neighbor’s young daughter plays violin at school. (These neighbors have several FDF attendees for many years; they enjoy the music but none of them play except the daughter.) Prior to last year’s FDF, I urged her to join the “Kids On Bluegrass” program. When she showed up with a messed-up fiddle and used that as an excuse for not participating, I told her I’d find a luthier to fix it. Steve Joyues performed “fiddle first aid” by flashlight so she’d have a working instrument for the next day. Once she finally met Frank Solivan and started interacting with the other kids, she enjoyed the experience. Jeanie Ramos is on a similar mission right now. She is acquainted with a teenaged violinist who recently quit studying classical music. She is supplying him with CDs and instructional DVDs (and her own guitar accompaniment), encouraging him to take up fiddling before his bowing skills deteriorate. Even if you’re not a parent, it is still your responsibility to encourage the young people in your life. It will help ensure the future of roots music; and someone will likely be grateful that you encouraged them to pursue a fun activity.
**Bluegrass Breakdown**

**Bluegrass Band**

- Cliff Compton

**Chasing the Dream**

And David sat in the basement of that old church
Playing “Deep River Blues” just like Doc Watson
While the Sufi Dancers Whirled around upstairs
Rattling the wooden floors and messin’ with his timing.

And Mike slept in most every morning
Until his street tough cat Brutus
Would smack him in the face to wake him up
Then he’d plug his electric into his Marshall and
play Led Zeppelin
Until the Gypsies upstairs banged on the floor to
quiet him down.

And Ray did stuff with a fiddle that no one really had a right to do
Living in the back of his truck with a mattress, a loaf of bread and a
Sombrero but
Talking to himself and wearing a dozen different hats
And me.

I just played my twelfth string like Richie Havens,
listened to the Nitty Gritty Dirt band playing “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” with Maybelle Carter
And dreamed of being Bob Dylan
And if we’d had had twenty dollars between the four of us, it would have all been alright.
And we were playing for ten dollars a night and beer
And we’d strong arm the tip jar, passing it after every set.

Maybe get another five bucks a piece
And I remember sitting in that greasy spoon off of Burnside Street in Portland, Oregon
Where they sold a hamburger that would cover a dinner plate for about a buck fifty
And the four of us pooled our resources and split that hamburger four ways.

**Enjoying the Afterglow**

From the crowd last night
When everything was perfect
And everything was right
And we were happy as it gets
All four of us
Flat broke
Near starving
Chasing the dream

**Note:** I’ll be giving my “Recording Bluegrass Instruments” workshop at the Great Valley Father’s Day Festival on Saturday, June 18 at 12:50 (lunch break), and showing my film “The Waltz To Westphalia” on Friday evening at 6:10 (dinner break). Both events will be in the room behind the Luthiers’ Pavilion, next to the food court.

**Chasing the Dream**

Flat broke
All four of us
And we were happy as it gets
When everything was perfect
From the crowd last night
And the four of us pooled our resources and split that hamburger four ways.

**Who invited Murphy to the Studio?**

I’m running a little slowly today.
Yesterday’s session began at 10:00 AM, PGE thought that 9:00 AM would be a good time to take the electricity to entire area.
As the drummer rolled up in his truck full of drums, my assistant engineer doubled over with acute food poisoning and had to leave.
He drove out of the parking lot, barely missing the arriving singer-songwriter, who was coming to demo up four tunes.
The drummer was right behind.
So no power, no water (we’re on a well here) no light, no gofer, an entire drum kit to mic and soundcheck, plus a bass rig and a line-of-sight set-up for the singer-songwriter, who was in a separate room but really wanted eye contact with the rhythm section as they tracked.
As part of the acoustic design of the studio, it has no windows to the outside, so it was dark really dark. I put the rugs down for the drummer and then got out of the way and carried drum cases out and set up cabling for the bass player.
While I was going up the microphones for the drum kit, the power came on.
The computer system came back up as well, except that ProTools couldn’t find the attached authorization key and wouldn’t launch.
So I smiled and re-booted.
Then I re-booted the computer.
Finally ProTools was happy and let me get back to work.
This is going to be a long day,
I said quietly to myself as the producer arrived, unaware that we were in post-power failure mode.

I miked the drums in a fairly typical fashion for an acoustic pop-rock session.
Each of the drums and the high hat gets its own microphone/preamp chain, and above the kit I placed a pair of adjustable condenser microphones in a stereo pair, pointing to opposite sides of the kit.
For these mics, I used a fairly wide pick-up pattern to enhance the overall ambience sound of the drum kit.
For the kick drum I placed one mic inside, close to the beater, and put another mic outside, about 10” from the front head.
I like having the two different kick drum sounds when I’m mixing a session like this, so I can turn up one mic if I need more bottom-end thrust, or turn up the other if I need more of the “tap” of the beater against the head.

I used condenser mics for everything except the snare and kick drums.
Earlier in the week, I had prepared a ProTools template for this session, labeling all the channels with the appropriate instrument, microphone and preamp names.
So as I raced to get the session underway without the help of a second engineer, I glanced at the computer monitor periodically to see what microphone, patch point, and ProTools input to use. The gods and goddesses were with me, and the miking, patching and routing went quickly.
The bass player was playing electric, and carries his own custom preamplifier, so routing that into ProTools was fast and simple.

Then I turned my attention to the singer’s guitar.
I set up an xy pair of condenser mics in a spot where he could play and watch the drummer, and took a line from his guitar’s built-in pick-up.
Each of these signals went to separate ProTools tracks, so when we’re mixing we can adjust each one separately.
I set up his vocal mic (a large diaphragm condenser set to a tight cardioid, or unidirectional pattern) so that he could both play and sing as the drums and bass went down.

When we finally carried the last drum cases out of the studio last night after 10:00 PM, I realized it had been a twelve-hour session.
We all worked hard, and in spite of all the little gremlins that had tried to thwart the session, we had 4 tunes “in the can.”
But I really don’t remember falling asleep last night...

Joe Weed records acoustic music at his Highland Studios near Los Gatos, California. He has released six albums of his own, produced many albums for independent artists and labels, and does soundtracks for film, TV and museums. He recently worked on the PBS film “Andrew Jackson: Good, Evil, and the Presidency.” Reach Joe by calling (408) 353-3353, by email at jcow@highlandpublishing.com, or by visiting joweed.com.

Joe Weed’s Studio Insider

**Bluegrass Band**

- Cliff Compton

**Chasing the Dream**

And David sat in the basement of that old church
Playing “Deep River Blues” just like Doc Watson
While the Sufi Dancers Whirled around upstairs
Rattling the wooden floors and messin’ with his timing.

And Mike slept in most every morning
Until his street tough cat Brutus
Would smack him in the face to wake him up
Then he’d plug his electric into his Marshall and
play Led Zeppelin
Until the Gypsies upstairs banged on the floor to
quiet him down.

And Ray did stuff with a fiddle that no one really had a right to do
Living in the back of his truck with a mattress, a loaf of bread and a
Sombrero but
Talking to himself and wearing a dozen different hats
And me.

I just played my twelfth string like Richie Havens,
listened to the Nitty Gritty Dirt band playing “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” with Maybelle Carter
And dreamed of being Bob Dylan
And if we’d had had twenty dollars between the four of us, it would have all been alright.
And we were playing for ten dollars a night and beer
And we’d strong arm the tip jar, passing it after every set.

Maybe get another five bucks a piece
And I remember sitting in that greasy spoon off of Burnside Street in Portland, Oregon
Where they sold a hamburger that would cover a dinner plate for about a buck fifty
And the four of us pooled our resources and split that hamburger four ways.

**Enjoying the Afterglow**

From the crowd last night
When everything was perfect
And everything was right
And we were happy as it gets
All four of us
Flat broke
Near starving
Chasing the dream

**Joe Weed**

**Bluegrass Breakdown**

By Chuck Poling

**Bluegrass Confidential**

**From Page A-18**

Added Ted, “Belle’s ‘Square Peg in the Round’ has a close-to-autobiographical bent to it and is a true bluegrass song. My own ‘Teardrops Turned to Snow’ is just an attempt at writing a tragically ballad in a minor key that tells an intriguing tale and has enough drama to make for interesting listening. Diana’s ‘Life of the Party’ was an inspired novelty that reveals just a glimpse of her facet.”

Once the song selection was agreed upon, arrangements had to be worked out—which required a bit of back and forth between individual members.

“It’s very much a consensus sound: arrangements are done by group—which can take longer—but ultimately everyone is on board with the overall approach to a song,” said Tom. “Different people contribute more than others at different points, but everyone gets a hearing when arrangement ideas are be batted around.”

“We debate this stuff heavily, run through the options presented, and decide as a group what works best. Most of the time consensus works, but on occasion it takes persistence to either win the day or sway the debate,” said Ted.

“We resolve our differences the hard way—by talking through them,” said Jordan. “Collaborating with other musicians to craft a song is one of the reasons I love music, and I’m so glad to have the opportunity to work with the great musicians in this band.”

But sometimes “We have a rule that we at least give a good try to any song a band member brings for consideration before it’s rejected out of hand.” Once accepted, we start the group work of dissecting the song for hooks, arrangements, tempo, and vocal harmonies. This is where it gets tricky, and sometimes someone will feel very strongly about something but be ouvoted by the majority decision.”

However they managed to work it out, the results speak for themselves. Long Lonesome Day highlights the considerable range of musical styles and individual talents within the band. It’s the balancing act between the producers’ professional-level production values of a studio album and the fire and fun of a live recording. The Bluegrass sound is heavily influenced by rock, swing, and folk, and is heavily accented by hard-driving rhythm and tight harmonies. But on this album they also demonstrate the ability to put over every type of song, from a rollicking version of Elvis Costello’s “Big Light” to slower, mournful material like “Black Lace and Diamonds” (written by Belle’s mother, Jean Brandon) and the title track.

Putting out the CD took months of intensive effort and considerable cost, but now that it’s complete, Belle Monroe and Her Brewglass Boys can take great satisfaction in a job well done. Long Lonesome Day is the perfect showcase for the multi-talented sextet and, just as importantly for them, it’s a fitting tribute to their fallen brother Rick Hendricks.