

PICKIN' POST

The official publication of The Louisville Bluegrass Music Association

Spring 2017 issue 60



**Remembering
Bluegrass Music
Legend
Danny Jones**

8th Annual Pickin' and Pig Roast

Saturday, May 13 2017

11:00 am— 6:00 pm

Lapping Park, Endris Lodge

Clarksville, IN

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Pickin' Post

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Remembering Bluegrass Legend Danny Jones

by Harry Bickel, Jr.

It is always hard to write about the passing of a musician friend. As I have said before, and will probably say again, when a friend who is a musician dies, you lose not only the friend, but also his or her music. In this case, it is even harder because Danny was a great musician and he and I were close friends for over 50 years. I'm not sure exactly when I met Danny but it was probably at Art Stamper's farm, sometime in the middle 1960's. Danny and I would go out to Art's on weekends and literally stay up all night playing. I think Art helped both of us become better musicians and he certainly gave us both an appreciation of and the ability to "hear" fiddle tunes. It was a wonderful gift that Danny and I have carried with us all these years.

I don't have many funny stories to tell about Danny. He had a good sense of humor but he wasn't a cutup or clown like a lot of the people we ran around with. I kind of think of him as a "gentle giant", standing in the background but providing incredible power to a group. You never had to worry about Danny doing his part. It was always there. Back in the heyday of the Bluegrass Hotel, Danny was a regular visitor. As such, he was able to influence a whole new generation of pickers that came through the house and the city. In the late 1970's there was a snowstorm that shut Louisville down for two weeks. We were fine at the house because we had a Jeep and could make daily runs to the White Castle. The only outside person who braved the cold and snow was Danny. As I remember, he showed up and stayed several days. A lot of music was played during those two weeks.

Danny had quite a career in Bluegrass music. In the 1960's he was a founding member of the Bluegrass Alliance, a signal band that changed the music forever. Not only was the Alliance different and more forward thinking than most other bands at the time, it was the band that ultimately spawned an entire branch of music known as Newgrass. A lot of careers were launched by the various versions of the Bluegrass Alliance, including those of Vince Gill, Sam Bush, Dan Crary, Tony Rice and others. Danny's voice was an extremely important part of the Bluegrass Alliance's sound. Danny was also a member of Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys. That is a big deal, particularly for those of us who were listening to and playing Bluegrass music back then. None of the rest of us did that, just Danny. Monroe had pretty much his choice of musicians and he picked Danny as his guitar player and lead singer. That was quite an honor for any musician at that time. Danny joined the band in June of 1971, but was only with them for a short period of time, leaving for personal reasons. Danny enjoyed his tenure with Monroe and often talked about riding on the bus and learning fiddle tunes from him.

I do remember one funny story from Danny's time with Bill. We were all at a festival one weekend and I was wearing this old, black cowboy hat. Danny said "let me borrow your hat for a few days." I gave it to him but I didn't really know why he wanted it. He later told me he was wearing it just to mess with Bill. When you were a Bluegrass Boy, you dressed like Bill Monroe told you, which included wearing a white hat. He said Bill would walk by him all weekend and say "I've got a hat on the bus if you want a hat!" I think I've still got that hat somewhere.

Danny played with the Goins Brothers for a number of years in the 1970's and 1980's. It roughly coincided with time when Art Stamper was playing with them. Steve Cooley frequently played bass with them. The Goins Brothers band was a great traditional band from Kentucky that was a direct descendant of the famous Lonesome Pine Fiddlers.

Danny can be heard on a few albums, but unfortunately there is not nearly enough. He is on the original Bluegrass Alliance album, Dan Crary's "Bluegrass Guitar" album and two of the Goins Brothers albums. He also chopped mandolin on two of Art Stamper instrumental albums. I sincerely wish there had been more.

These are the nationally recognized bands that I know Danny played with on a somewhat regular basis. There may be others that he played with for shorter periods of time but I can't tell you what they are. I also can't begin to tell you all of the local bands he was involved with. I know I played a lot of jobs with him and saw him play many other times, but I can't tell you when or where. I just know that Danny was always there, whether it was a job, a jam session or a party. The hard part is that now he is no longer "there" except in our heads and our hearts and our music.



L-R Back; Kyle Ellison, Jack Ashworth, Danny Jones, Mike Schroeder, Marshall Shelor, John Schroeder. Front; Harry Bickel Jr., John Rice
photo courtesy of Harry Bickel

In December of this past year, when I found out he only had a few months to live, I talked with Danny a number of times on the phone. I know that different people react differently to cancer. Some withdraw and don't want to see anybody, while others go on with their lives as best they can. Danny was one of the latter. On the first call, he talked frankly about his illness and said "I guess I'm going to sit here and just fade away." I asked him if he would like me to contact some people and let them know so they can contact him and he said "yes, that would be fine. I would like that".

On one of our calls, I asked Danny if he would like some people to come over and pick some with him. He was very enthusiastic but said to check with him before we came to make sure he felt well enough. We decided that I would try to set up something for the following Friday but I would call that morning to see how he felt. I didn't need to call. He called me on Thursday and said "are you guys coming tomorrow?" Obviously, he wanted to be surrounded by music until the end.

About eight of us went over to Danny's on that first Friday afternoon in early January and we had a wonderful time sitting around, playing mostly fiddle tunes. Some of his family members and friends were there to enjoy it with him. It had a party-like atmosphere but you could tell he was weak and wasn't feeling particularly well. Despite his condition, Danny absolutely loved it. He played his mandolin on every tune and even sang a few songs. His playing and singing were still great. His wife, Nancy, to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude for taking such good care of him, provided a delicious lunch for everyone. After about two hours, however, he had grown tired and we left. Before we left we decided to make Friday "Danny's Day." Fortunately, we were able to come over the next two Fridays in a row. It was very enjoyable and we all looked forward to it. As luck would have it, I recorded the third session. After the third week, however, his health had deteriorated such that we were no longer able to get together with him.

I made him a copy of the third session and called the next Friday and left a message to let him or Nancy know that I would be dropping it off in their mailbox. I said I knew he had had a rough week and didn't want to bother them. About three minutes later, my cell phone rang but I couldn't answer it because I was driving. I saw it was from Danny's phone so I pulled over to listen to the message. Loud and clear was Danny's voice "where are you man? I'm waitin' for you!" When I showed up he was walking around outside with his stepson. We went inside and sat on the couch and listened to the CD together. He really enjoyed hearing it even though he was drifting in and out. Nancy said I had caught him on a really good day. When we were done listening he walked me to the door and gave me a big hug. It was the last time I would ever see him. After he passed, Nancy told me he listened to that recording over and over during his final weeks. During his last 24 hours she played it next to his bed.

Of all the tunes we played on those Fridays, the one I can't get out of my mind is Danny singing "Falling Leaves". I don't think I will ever forget it. His voice was so pure and clear. Although all of us were doing this for Danny, I think we all agree that it enriched our lives as much or more than his. It is something that all musicians should do for one another.

So, what do you say about someone who has been a constant presence in your life for over 50 years. You can say "great musician", "great singer", "good guy". A lot of words come to mind but I think the most important one is "friend". Danny was a friend to me as he was to all of us. In his own words "after all, that's what it's all about". I can't tell you how much we will miss him.

When I was asked to write this tribute to Danny I immediately realized that I could not do it alone. I began contacting folks who I knew were important in Danny's life and who considered him important to them. I asked them to write something. I told them to say whatever they wanted, what they thought of Danny as a musician, a friend, a mentor, whatever came to mind. Below you will find those tributes. I know I overlooked a lot of people, and for that I am very sorry. Perhaps they can write letters of tribute to Pickin' Post for inclusion in future editions. Here are the comments I received:



L-R Ebo Walker, Buddy Spurlock, Danny Jones, Dan Crary
photo courtesy of Harry Bickel, Jr.

~ It was my privilege to work with Danny Jones in the Bluegrass Alliance band in 1968-1970. After the original Bluegrass Alliance lead singer left us, we invited Danny to join us in 1968. It was our good luck that he was available, and from the moment of our first rehearsal it was clear that he would be a powerful presence. Danny started out by just looking impressive: he was about 6'4" (dwarfed the mandolin he played), movie-star handsome and dignified-looking, and carried himself like a dancer. His voice was baritone-smooth and his range was wide enough that he could sing any song or any high lead or low harmony we needed. Danny's tone was rich, and he was one of those singers who could infallibly find the center of the note, every note, every time. He was a great pal and partner. Funny, smart, good conversationalist, very Kentucky, and an outrageously good singer; "Some guys got it all..." as the saying goes. One odd thing you can see in the old pictures: when we made a trio, Danny on the left at about 6-4, me in the middle at 6-2, and Lonnie Peerce on the right at about 5-10, we looked like we were standing on a Swiss mountainside. I guess we should have stood on the other side. Happily, I had a telephone conversation with Danny just a few days ago, in late January. He told me a little about his illness and said he hoped that we would all meet again and play music on the other side. And we reminisced about our old band and the challenges we faced, and agreed that we made some good music and a little Bluegrass music history. Then I thanked him for his influence on me: Danny was always the most "pro" member of the band, while I was a comparative novice in a band. I learned a lot about musicianship and performing from Danny. I guess I had never before thanked him for it outright, because he seemed a little surprised, and then he said, "Dan, that's better than money." That was a very Danny-esque comment: sorta' country, a little guy-talk macho, makes you laugh, paints a picture, and you won't ever forget it. Just like the guy himself. Godspeed, Danny... knowing you was better than money. **Dan Crary-Placerville, CA**



L-R Danny, Dan Crary, Sam Bush, John Cowan, JD Crowe
photo courtesy of Dan Crary

~ My life and my music life would have been substantially lessened by not having Dan in my corner. He was a friend, teacher and cheerleader to so many of us that were trying to learn about playing bluegrass. He knew how all the pieces fit together the right way and was a master at supporting the song and the rest of the band instrumentally or vocally. I count knowing Dan and enjoying playing music with him as one of the finest things in my life. Thanks Danny Jones, I'm glad to have made your acquaintance. **Steve Cooley-Louisville, KY**



Doc Hamilton and Danny ca 1976P
hoto courtesy of Harry Bickel, Jr.

~ Danny was a fine musician who welcomed this Texas boy into a group of fine Kentucky pickers. Always smiling, joking and a joy to be around, he encouraged me in my search for the true bluegrass style. I learned a lot from him. **Doc Hamilton-Austin, TX**

~ The first time I saw Danny was on WLTV in Bowling Green, Kentucky. This was around 1966. He was with the Grayson County Boys. My sisters and I were playing on the Folk Show at the same station. The band referred to him as "Handsome Dan" and he was great at singing like Lester Flatt and Jim McReynolds. The band was sponsored by International Harvester and they wore cowboy hats with the IH logo on it. Not to long after that, they hired me as their fiddler. I was 14 years old. The next time I saw him was when he was with the Bluegrass Alliance. His voice made them a real force in Bluegrass music. He was a great, smooth singer. His rhythm chop on mandolin gave the band a real backbeat. When I joined the Alliance, my chop wasn't nearly as good as Danny's. Lonnie and Courtney were quick to tell me I needed to "play it like Danny did." So, I studied Danny's chop. I still use it today, particularly on songs like "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" and "One Tin Soldier". I still play them exactly like Danny did. One of my fondest memories of Danny is when he and Tony Rice and I drove to Nashville to pick up a mandolin. The three of us sang trios all the way back to Louisville. It was great. Danny was a great musician and singer and we will all miss him very much. **Sam Bush-Nashville, TN**

~ I'm not sure if Danny Jones smoked Prince Albert tobacco in his Kentucky State Championship pipe smoking pipe, but if there was ever anyone who truly earned the phrase, "prince of a guy", that would be Danny Jones. There was not a more generous, thoughtful, caring, and naturally talented person ever to have walked this planet that he graciously trod for 77 years. Danny didn't lead a

"charmed" life, but he led a life that exuded charm. When you were with Danny, all was right with the world and you were just happy to be spending quality time with a man that truly made life seem meaningful and fun. He set a high bar as founding member, and mandolin player for the Bluegrass Alliance. It was truly my honor during my time with that group to attempt to hold up the high standards that Danny established. Truly one of the Flowers of the Master's Bouquet....Danny Jones. **Al White-Berea, KY**



~ Danny and I started with Monroe's band the same night, Kenny Baker's Birthday, June 26 1971 in Lancaster Penn and he was with the band until September, with his last date being Stoverstown, Pa.. Kenny Baker and Joe Stuart were on fiddles, Jack Hicks banjo, I did bass and Bill, of course, played mandolin. Danny was one of the most positive people I have ever known, he always greeted you with a smile and a handshake and always had good things to say about others. I'm just heart broken right now..... Guess I assumed that some of us were going to live forever... But life goes on.... with or with out us... **Doug Hutchens-Spencer, VA**

~ Danny has been one of my biggest heroes when it comes to bluegrass. At a time when a great deal of pickers and singers focused on doing their best at emulating Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs, Danny sang in his own voice. A bluegrass traditionalist, yet not a hardline purist, he helped pave the way for more innovation, especially through his work with the Bluegrass Alliance. He'll certainly be missed, but his authenticity, and originality, will live on to influence generations to come. **Aaron Bibelhouser-Louisville, KY**

L-R Kenny Baker, Joe Stuart, Bill Monroe, Doug Hutchens, Danny Jones
Photo courtesy of Doug Hutchens



L-R Alan Phelps, Matt Phelps, Robin Thixton, Eddie Wells, Danny Jones, Murrell Thixton
photo courtesy of John Bochan



Danny and Bill Wolf
photo courtesy of Harry Bickel, Jr.

Danny Jones, Harry Bickel Jr.
Photo courtesy of Harry Bickel



In memory of
Danny Jones

Danny Boy

Londonderry Air - Traditional
Arr. Mike Schroeder

The image shows a musical score for the song "Danny Boy" in 4/4 time. It is arranged for Violin, Mandolin, and Guitar. The score is divided into three systems, each with a treble clef staff for the instrument and a guitar staff below it. Chord symbols are placed above the treble clef staves. The lyrics are written below the treble clef staves. The first system (measures 1-7) has chords C, C7, F, C, Am, and D7. The second system (measures 8-15) has chords G7, C, C7, F, C, G7, and C. The third system (measures 16-23) has chords G7, C, F, C, Am, F, and D7. The fourth system (measures 24-31) has chords G7, C, F, C, Am, C, Em, F, G7, and C. The lyrics are: "Oh, Danny Boy, the pipes the pipes are calling - from glen to glen, and down the mountain side. The summer's gone, and all the roses fall - ing. It's you, it's you must go and I must bide. But come ye back when summer's in the meadow, or when the valley's hushed and white with snow. And I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow, Oh, Danny Boy, Oh Danny Boy, I love you so!"

Danny Boy is a renowned Irish melody. Bill Monroe recorded Danny Boy on his Bluegrass Ramble album. This arrangement is dedicated to Danny Jones, a phenomenal singer, mandolinist, guitarist and teacher. We will miss you Danny!

~ Thank you Danny! In the late 1970s, I became interested in Bluegrass mandolin. At that time there were only two printed sources on mandolin playing. I had learned as much as I could from those books, but wanted to learn more. I sought out Danny and went to visit him at his home in Fern Creek one afternoon for a mandolin lesson. We played a few tunes and then he began to show me fiddle tunes that I didn't know. He was extremely generous with his knowledge. I had a cassette tape recorder and he recorded 45 minutes worth of fiddle tunes that I wanted to learn. He played them slowly so that I could capture every note. That was nearly 40 years ago and I still play most of those tunes just the way he recorded them for me. Danny lived life to the fullest. One year at the Kentucky State Fair, I sat and watched him win the Pipe Smoking Contest. On several occasions, Danny, Bill Wolf and I would go for a jog around Iroquois Park. Even though they were both older than me, they were able to run circles around me. I had the good fortune to hear Danny play many times (with the Bluegrass Alliance, The Goins Brothers and jam sessions at Bean Blossom) and he was always an inspiration. From my perspective, he's one of the best singers and instrumentalists I've ever heard. He was also a great teacher. In the music business, you can often encounter individuals with big egos. Danny was not like that. He was very humble and always willing to share. In the last few weeks of Danny's life, Harry Bickel suggested that a group of musicians visit Danny to help support him and play some music with him. Even while facing medical challenges, Danny's playing and singing were terrific. His rendition of Kentucky Waltz just days before he passed was as good as I've ever heard anybody sing it. Danny found joy in music making and will continue to inspire me as long as I'm playing.

Mike Schroeder-Louisville, KY

~ Back in the late 1960's, my friend Mac Smith told me he had been to a saloon in Louisville and had seen one of the best bands he had ever heard. He especially talked about a guy named Dan Crary and his flat-picking guitar playing. I finally drove down from Cincinnati to Louisville to hear the Bluegrass Alliance play at the Red Dog Saloon. Like Mac, I was very impressed with Crary's guitar playing but I was overwhelmed by Danny Jones' singing. I specifically remember him singing "West Montana Hannah" and "Sweet Sunny South". I was also impressed by how well all of these guys treated me after the show. Although none of them knew me, they all acted like we were old friends. I actually made a recording of their show on a small, portable tape recorder. I can't tell you how many times I listened to that show, especially when I was driving down the Western Kentucky Turnpike to visit my parents. I played "Sweet Sunny South" over and over until I had learned every word and, as best I could, to sing it just like Danny. I still sing it exactly the same way today. Hearing Danny sing was like being hit by lightning. It actually changed my life.

Harry Sparks-Ryland Heights, KY

~ I remember Danny well from the 1960's. He used to come up to Lexington and sit in with us. In fact, Doyle and I came very close to asking him to join the band. His singing was far superior to most Bluegrass singers at the time. He was an asset to any band he worked with. I only wish more people could have heard him sing. I thought the world of Danny. He was a great singer and a good person. He was a real gentleman. **J.D. Crowe-Nicholasville, KY**

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