



WYATT ELLIS



Bluegrass music is known for nurturing young musicians, so it is relatively common to spot the early rising stars of the genre. However, the sudden success of thirteen-year-old Wyatt Ellis, during the pandemic, was quite unexpected. Looking back now, it's easy to see his love for music has been there all along.

When he was nine years old, Wyatt heard Bill Monroe for the first time and fell in love with bluegrass music. Shortly after that, he talked his dad into buying him a used mandolin off the wall at a Knoxville music store. "Bill Monroe is my biggest musical inspiration. He created a whole vocabulary for the mandolin," said Wyatt. "There is just something real about bluegrass. The first time I heard him I knew that's what I wanted to do."

Before the pandemic, Wyatt was spending upwards of three hours a day shuttling between Boy Scouts, Tae Kwon Do, soccer practice, and squeezing in a weekly 30-minute mandolin lesson: pretty much the life of an active 10-year-old boy. Abruptly, most of that stopped, leaving him at home (fortunately with his mandolin). Due to a series of soccer injuries, Wyatt spent his first six months playing mandolin with a twice-broken wrist.

"I got serious about mandolin during 2020 when everything shut down," said Wyatt. "When the pandemic began, I lost all of my real life connections to music. I don't have any musicians in my family, but I found an entire bluegrass community online." Since then, Wyatt has spent more time growing his music and connecting with many other artists and mentors.

In 2020, he was chosen for a Tennessee Folklife apprenticeship with Sierra Hull. In 2021, Wyatt was chosen as a Gibson Generation Artist—the first ever for bluegrass and the mandolin! Wyatt was chosen for another Tennessee Folklife apprenticeship in 2021 with Paul Brewster on bluegrass vocals. In early 2022, Wyatt was accepted as a student of Bobby Osborne through a scholarship the Kentucky School of Bluegrass and Traditional music. Wyatt and Bobby are currently working through each of the instrumentals on Bobby's album "Bobby and His Mandolin."

In addition to learning hundreds of fiddle tunes during the shutdown, Wyatt has learned most of Bill Monroe's tunes note-for-note on mandolin. He has been a student in Christopher Henry and David McLaughlin's Monroe Workshop Series since its inception in 2020 and worked as a private student of Mike Compton on the subject as well. In addition to these apprenticeships and workshops, the pandemic opened a world of virtual learning at the knee of some of the best mandolin players in the world.



When asked about Wyatt, Peter Rowan had some insight into his hard to explain abilities.

“Wyatt’s understanding of music goes way beyond mechanical; he intuits the ancient tones!”

Wyatt has performed on stage with many notable mandolin players. The young mandolin player recently assembled his own youth bluegrass band for a series of shows at the famed “Bluegrass Underground” Caverns in Pelham, TN. He was invited back to perform at the Cavern’s very first “Cave Fest” bluegrass festival which was headlined by two of his heroes Sam Bush and Sierra Hull. In October of 2022, Wyatt played mandolin at the Induction of legendary bluegrass musician Peter Rowan into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame. The thirteen year old was recently invited to play mandolin at The Grand Reopening of the Ellis Theater by his ultimate mandolin hero Marty Stuart in Marty's hometown Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Wyatt has written dozens of instrumentals in the past two years. He is currently working on an album of original tunes that were inspired by, or co-written with, twelve of his mandolin heroes! Wyatt also began playing guitar and fiddle in 2021. Inspired by the sheer talent in the bluegrass world, the teenager is well on his way to becoming a bluegrass multi-instrumentalist. However, bluegrass mandolin will always be his first love.