

Wyatt Ellis

13-year-old Multi-instrumentalist - Maryville, TN

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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 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 it, 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, all 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. Wyatt was chosen as a Gibson Generation Artist—the first ever for bluegrass and the mandolin in 2021! Wyatt was chosen for another Tennessee Folklife apprenticeship that same year with Paul Brewster studying bluegrass vocals. In 2022, Wyatt was accepted as a mandolin 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, Wyatt has learned almost every Bill Monroe tune and song 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. 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.

Wyatt has performed on stage with many notable mandolin players since the pandemic eased. He assembled a youth bluegrass band in 2022 for a series of summer camp shows at the famed "Bluegrass Underground" Caverns in Pelham, TN. He was invited back to perform at the Cavern's inaugural "Cave Fest" which was headlined by two of his favorite mandolin players, and heroes, Sam Bush and Sierra Hull.

Wyatt was recently chosen to play mandolin at the Induction of Peter Rowan into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame. In an unprecedented turn of events, thirteen-year-old Wyatt played on stage at the International Bluegrass Music Association Awards Show along side the eighty-year-old bluegrass legend. Additionally, Wyatt performed with Peter at his record label showcase and was invited back to play a Bill Monroe tune with the band at their big show to close out the IBMA 2022 week! Wyatt also played in the selective Kids on Bluegrass Awards Show Band. He had four more showcases to round out his very busy, very first IBMA week.

Wyatt has written at least 60 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 and is well on his way to becoming a bluegrass multi-instrumentalist. Inspired by the lineage of bluegrass musicians that have come before him, Wyatt strives to preserve bluegrass music for many generations to come.