The bluegrass community is celebrating the new president of Yale, Peter Salovey, who took over the Ivy League school at the end of June in 2013. You see, he’s a bass player, he loves Ralph Stanley, and he’s in a band called The Professors of Bluegrass.

He has recently been named the Chairman on the Board of Directors for the International Bluegrass Music Museum, and is working with the Foundation for Bluegrass Music – and it started with a radio show and a rented banjo.

When Peter Salovey first started his undergrad at Stanford in the 1970s, he was enamored by a local radio show on KFAT out of Santa Cruz. The radio show was Cousin Al’s Bluegrass Hour, and Salovey liked it because it wasn’t disco, which was all that seemed to be on the radio at the time. To further entice his developing taste in the music, Salovey rented a banjo from a local shop and started learning clawhammer and Scruggs style, all while studying and climbing the academic ranks.

The East Coast called his name, and Salovey started graduate school at Yale, finding communion with friend Kelly Brownell and his neighbor, another banjo player. “[Kelly] said [his neighbor] played banjo better than me, and suggested I play bass, so I did,” Salovey laughs. Along with all night studying sessions, Salovey would come to know all night jam sessions. The Professors of Bluegrass solidified in the early ‘90s with an all-Yale band membership of students and faculty. Since then, the band’s lineup has changed and refreshed, always including those within the Yale community.

“It’s been a great way to foster learning and a community through bluegrass,” Salovey said. “The bond playing music creates between students and faculty is something truly special. We all get something out of it.”

Before assuming the position as Yale’s president, Salovey has served his time at Yale as: Chair of the Psychology Department, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Dean of Yale College, and Provost of the University. His passion for teaching both in the classroom and through music is evident in his endeavors. As a band member, he has played with several students who have gone on to succeed – in music, and outside of it. One such member is Greg Liszt, a graduate of Yale who also earned his PhD in molecular biology at MIT, now a banjo player for Crooked Still and The Deadly Gentlemen.

The Professors of Bluegrass recorded an album this year, Pick or Perish, so they would have something to bring with them when they played ROMP in Owensboro, KY. They have been warmly embraced, and a hot item as they don’t tour because of their schedules as full-time faculty members and students.

The current lineup for The Professors of Bluegrass includes: banjo player Oscar Hills, Craig Harwood on mandolin, Sten Havumaki on guitar, and Matt Smith and Katie Scharf on fiddle. They will play at Salovey’s official inauguration as Yale’s President in October, with The Deadly Gentlemen joining in playing for the celebration.

Before taking on his new role as the Ivy League’s leader, Salovey and his wife took some time to travel through North Carolina, visiting some special bluegrass landmarks. “We listened to the Stanley Brothers the whole way,” he said. “The Stanley Brothers are my favorite.”

Congratulations to the Yale community, and “hoorah!” for bluegrass!