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Bluegrass in the Schools (and Beyond) Monthly Interest Group Launches [1]

Rather than continuing with a detailed network of subcommittees for Bluegrass in the Schools, now administered by the Foundation for Bluegrass Music, committee chair Dr. Tom Kopp and staff liaison Nancy Cardwell have initiated a monthly, web-based ?Bluegrass in the Schools (and Beyond)? interest group meeting hosted through IBMA?s subscription to webex.com.

Any IBMA member interested in joining the monthly online conversation about bluegrass music education is welcome to join the call. Our group size for WebEx conferences is 25 maximum. Members of current Bluegrass in the Schools committees will be invited, as well as other individuals who express an interest on a first come, first served basis.

Meetings so far have been hosted (for participants in four time zones) on the third Friday of the month at 4:30 p.m. Central. We?re in the process of polling participants to determine the best day of the week and time, so stay tuned to ibma.org and this publication for future dates and times. Please call Nancy Cardwell at 615-256-3222 or email nancyc@ibma.org [2] if you?d like to be contacted about future meetings.

The Bluegrass in the Schools Mini-Grant Approval Subcommittee?headed by Chairperson Mark Panfil, an elementary music teacher in Buffalo, New York and also a member of the Foundation for Bluegrass Music board?will continue meeting by email when grant applications are received through the year. The Bluegrass Lesson Plans Competition committee finished their work in February 2012. The plan for 2013 is to re-group with a wider focus on small grants for educational programs?including school lesson plans, bluegrass education programs either during the school day or at afterschool programs, private schools, home schools, festival-based bluegrass academies and workshops, clubs & organizations and l bluegrass education programs for participants of all ages?for example, at senior communities or assisting living facilities.

Overall, Dr. Kopp says the purpose of the expanded Bluegrass in the Schools program is ?to design, discover, cultivate and celebrate efforts within the bluegrass music community to foster learning, growth and well-being. Bluegrass is much more than a musical genre,? he continues. ?The music and the culture surrounding it feature an amazing array of supports and opportunities for ordinary folks to attain extraordinary accomplishments and be part of a positive community. We are all Uncle Pen! If it were not for the learning, growth and well-being young Bill Monroe experienced through the tutelage of his Uncle Pen?who took young Bill in when his parents passed away and gave him opportunities to play his mandolin at local dances?would bluegrass exist at all??

Interest group participants so far have included full-time, substitute and retired teachers,

college professors, a rep from the International Bluegrass Music Museum, independent educators and workshop leaders in Texas, New York, California, Colorado, Tennessee, Ohio, Arkansas, Kentucky, West Virginia and Washington state. The February meeting featured a presentation from Mark Dillon, who teaches music at Jordan-Matthews High School in Siler City, N.C., ?A large part of my program revolves around acoustic ensembles including bluegrass,? Dillon commented. ?I realized years ago that music education was sticking to the Western Classical tradition and was missing some of the best musicians in the schools, those kids sitting in the hallway playing guitar. Now I build my program around making sure that we address the community aspect of music. In my community (and for me) that is bluegrass and interestingly Mariachi. I also teach and work a great deal with the JAM (Junior Appalachian Musicians) program; it seems like it would dovetail nicely with what is happening in IBMA.?

Interest group calls last an hour, with the first 10 minutes focused on bluegrass education news and developments, followed by a 20 minute presentation from the featured speaker and then Q&A with participants. Attendees need a high-speed internet connection to access Webex.com online, with either a landline or cell phone for audio?or a headset to plug into a computer with a microphone. If participants have a webcam, we see their faces when they speak. The presenter on the call also has the ability to share his or her computer desktop?displaying documents, PowerPoints, photos, video, music and websites.

The next interest group web-based meeting will feature Beth Fortune (Education Director for Wintergrass/ Seattle public school middle school music teacher) with a report on the Wintergrass 2012 Youth Orchestra program. Fortune, along with Tom Peterson and Karen Cramer (Wash. history and music teachers), Renata Bratt (cellist/workshop instructor from California), Andy Carlson (head of the Dept. of Music at Denison University in Granville, Ohio which instituted a four-year bluegrass degree in 2011), and Nancy Cardwell from the Foundation for Bluegrass Music/ IBMA have been invited to make presentations at the American String Teacher Association (ASTA) conference in Atlanta March 22-23. President-elect of ASTA Bob Phillips, has been the conductor of the Wintergrass Youth Orchestra for the past two years.

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