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By Shannon W. Turner

Your brain is fried, but you feel exhilarated. You've been presented with so much information, met so many new and wonderful people, seen so many new horizons that your head is spinning. You've heard great music, shared important goals, and been vulnerable to people who were complete strangers a few days ago. But now it's the last day, and a new friend has presented you with a plaque that has your name on it.

Congratulations; you have just graduated from Leadership Bluegrass, the intensive three-day event that prepares current and future leaders in the industry to recognize the strengths and challenges facing the bluegrass industry, and how to integrate their own goals with the needs of the music.

Twenty-five class members from around the country and Canada convened in Nashville March 7 through 9 to experience the extraordinary program that is Leadership Bluegrass. Since its inception in 2000, more than 300 leaders have graduated from the course, from all corners of the industry – artists, songwriters, publishers, journalists, promoters, event planners, managers, booking agents, attorneys, and the whole range of roles that serve the bluegrass community. They were challenged by panelists, lecturers, group activities and discussions to unearth their individual strengths, so that they could apply what they learned to their responsibilities at home.

Attendees were welcomed Thursday by Planning Committee Chairperson Alan Tompkins of the Bluegrass Heritage Foundation in Dallas, IBMA Executive Director Nancy Cardwell, Mark Mason from BMI, the host of the event, and facilitator Trisha Tubbs from Seattle. The class was thrilled by the appearance of Hall of Fame member Sonny Osborne, banjo legend of the Osborne Brothers, who kindly took the time to encourage participation in the industry and welcome everyone to the conference.

After a presentation from Cardwell, participants got to know each other during lunch; the program places a high value and priority on creating positive relationships among its membership. There were ample opportunities to make business connections, but better yet, there was the wide open chance to make new friends.

The remainder of Thursday was highlighted by presentations from Alison Brown and Garry West, musicians and owners of Compass Records, who stressed the importance of making and maintaining a business plan to help you strategize and reach your goals in a practical way. The group also heard from Al McCree and Scott Scoville, entrepreneurs who have built their successful businesses from the ground up, and how to maintain momentum through the lean years. Award-winning bassist Missy Raines (Missy Raines and the New Hip) lent her

insights on living the life of an artist, the trials of the road, the joys of the music and other facets of the total artist experience.

One highlight for many was learning about the maze of song publishing, royalty distribution and copyright law, as led by Belmont University's Dan Keen with panelists John Allen from BMG, songwriter/producer Jerry Salley, and Tim Fink from SESAC. Next there was focus on the artist's team, which featured longtime Alison Krauss manager Denise Stiff, booking agent Lee Olsen, digital marketer Katy Kirby from Thirty Tigers, John P. Strohm, attorney from Loeb and Loeb LLC and Kim Fowler, owner and publicist from Two Dog Media.

A class favorite was the Leadership and Individual Applications workshop, led by Liz Allen Fey of Management Solutions Group, LLC. Members took a survey of various leadership traits to discover their own leadership style and learned to determine how their personal style might best serve them as they go forward. For IBMA Administrative/Media Assistant Katherine Coe, who was part of the class, this was an important part of her experience.

"I enjoy doing [projects] that help me learn more about myself," says Coe. "The more I understand the way I personally approach a project or problem, the better I can successfully work through it."

There are now opportunities to study bluegrass music in higher education, which Andy Carlson (Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Music at Denison University in Ohio) spoke more on. He shared some of his teaching methods with the class, and then invited the group to get out their own instruments for a short jam on "Will the Circle Be Unbroken." Being a room full of bluegrassers, he didn't have to ask twice!

On Friday the class was welcomed to Missy Raines and Ben Surratt (also on the planning committee) for a night of good food, good company and grand picking. Some extra guests were invited, including esteemed author Neil Rosenberg, who was later found picking the Five with great ease; Carlson, who makes magic with a fiddle; Lora Murphy from the Muddy River Band; Daniel Routh from Nu-Blu; songwriter/producer/IBMA Board member Jon Weisberger with his wife Deborah; and Brian Perry from Sixthman Productions (Mountain Song at Sea). It wasn't long before much of the party drifted to the basement, where a studio filled with musicians and toe-tappers who got their jam on until late in the evening.

Saturday the group was welcomed by Stephanie Taylor from Bone McAllester Norton, who hosted the day's events. Navigating the Digital Jungle was a great session teaching how to best market yourself, band, or entity through social and digital media with Jay Frank from DigSin, Jenny Smythe from Girlilla Marketing and Cassie Petry from Crowd Surf. New Trends and Developments in Presenting Live Music was the next panel, where artist Peter Cooper, Warner Music Group's Jamie Younger and Lindsay Hayes from Red Beet Records demonstrated the unique possibilities of the online Stage It program; Craig Havighurst showed examples from Bluegrass Underground and the popular Music City Roots radio show and Brian Perry fielded a number of questions about the Mountain Song at Sea cruise.

Lunchtime Saturday marked the official graduation from Leadership Bluegrass. Each participant was awarded a plaque, presented by another member of the class with words of personal encouragement. Attendee Ron Murphy from Ohio, a longtime "grassier and member of the Muddy River Band, was chosen to represent the 2013 class at IBMA in Raleigh during

WOB.

One of the topics in the open forum was: How do we make the big umbrella of the bluegrass genre appeal to the largest possible audience? How can we make it a mainstream music in the marketplace? These continue to be topics of the larger conversation that face our industry, and this group and all of bluegrass will be working together to find the answers.

Kayla Hotte of Kayla Hotte and Her Rodeo Pals, from Edmonton, Alberta, is taking away much from her Leadership Bluegrass experience.

?It helped me understand aspects of the business that I knew nothing about,? she explained. ?Like how publishing works, and the different parts of an artist?s team. It was good to hear Missy Raines talk about all the things that an artist goes through to make their music. I learned it is important to make a business plan.? She agrees that the program will be very advantageous to her as she moves forward with her career as a singer/songwriter in her native Canada.

Closing, IBMA Board of Directors Vice-Chair Jon Weisberger spoke about leadership opportunities within the IBMA and the industry, while Alan Tompkins shared his story of how he used his skills and opportunities to grow bluegrass right in his home area of Dallas. Both are real, valuable options, worthy of consideration and practice by anybody in the industry, not just those who have been a part of Leadership Bluegrass.

If you have any questions about how you can be a part of the exciting changes that are happening right now in bluegrass, contact the IBMA. They are ready to help you find your place, and just like the old Uncle Sam posters, they WANT YOU!

Congratulations to the graduates:

Darin Aldridge; Darin and Brooke Aldridge; Cherryville, NC

Melissa Armstrong; Detour; Sand Lake, MI

Andrea Ball; Make Welcome Entertainment; Washington, DC

Katherine Coe; IBMA; Nashville, TN

Jeremy Darrow; The Erin McDermott Band/Freelance Musician; Nashville, TN

John DeMarce; DC Bluegrass Union; Washington, DC

Susie Glaze; Hilonesome Music, Susie Glaze & the Hilonesome Band; Burbank, CA

KC Groves; Artist & Composer; Lyons, CO

Kayla Hotte; Kayla Hotte & her Rodeo Pals; Ardrossan, Alberta, CA

Caroline Isachsen; Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival; Delmar, NY

Steven Johnson; MerleFest; Wilkesboro, NC

Lori King; Bluegrass Music Association of Iowa; Drakesville, IA

Jordan Laney; Appalachian State University; Vilas, NC

Ron Murphy; Muddy River Band; Wilmington, OH

Amy Reitnouer; The Bluegrass Situation; Los Angeles, CA

Carolyn Routh; Nu-Blu, Red Squared Audio; Siler City; NC

Sheila Selby; Boston Bluegrass Union; Brookline, MA

Carly Smith; International Bluegrass Music Museum; Owensboro, KY

Erin Stamper; WAMU's Bluegrass Country; Washington, DC

Shannon Turner; Freelance writer/journalist; Hermitage, TN

Missy Werner; Missy Werner Band; Liberty Township, OH

Jill Wiese; Bluegrass Association of North Dakota; Washburn, ND

Kristi Wilcox; Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP; Nashville, TN

Courtney Worthen; PineCone ? The Piedmont Council of Traditional Music; Raleigh, NC

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