

A Bluegrass Belonging

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by Shelby C. Berry

The bluegrass community is incredibly special, especially for young people. They may grow up surrounded by other young people who play bluegrass, or they may finally get a sense of belonging when meeting other young musicians at a jam session or a Tomorrow's Bluegrass Stars convention. Regardless of the reason, this sense of belonging is something for which to be grateful.

Taller than You is an old-time bluegrass string band striving to keep old-time music alive, yet proudly still pushing its boundaries. The band is made up of a group of incredibly talented (and very tall!) young musicians that are proud to call themselves members of our tight-knit bluegrass family – Benjamin Haguewood, Kailee Spickes, Grace Stormont, Littlepage Sims, Chandler Spickes, and Gresham McMillon.



“I had been playing at the Ozark Folk Center for about six years when Ben Haguwood came to play at the hammered dulcimer contest,” said Kailee. “He needed a guitar player for backup. Someone introduced us, and I thought, ‘Wow, another giant!’ We instantly became friends because it’s not often that I get to look someone my age in the eyes at 6 feet, 3 inches. I twisted his arm over the next years and persuaded him to try out to be the next Ozark Folk Center musician. That is when our group formed!”

Once the band was founded, the group name seemed to roll off the tongue almost at once.

“Considering the founding members were both 6 foot, 3 inches, the name fit so well,” said Kailee. “In April of 2019, we were at the Southern Regional Hammered Dulcimer contest, and we had to submit a band name to enter. We had no name! So, after hearing the words, ‘I’m taller than you,’ and ‘No, I’m taller than you,’ my mom entered us in the contest as Taller than You. Ben and I can still be heard saying those words at every performance.”

Forming as a band less than two years ago, Taller than You has had an amazing amount of success for such a young band.

Awarded Group of the Year at the Ozark Folk Center in Arkansas in 2019 only one year after the group was formed, multiple members of the band hold multiple state, regional, and national titles – certifying themselves as accomplished instrumentalists and vocalists.





Grace has been named Arkansas State Banjo Champion. Ben was named the Deep South Hammered Dulcimer Champion, and he won second place at Nationals. Lastly, Kailee was named Arkansas Fiddle State Champion, Musician of the Year at the Ozark Folk Center in 2018, and Female Performer of the Year at the Ozark Folk Center in 2019 – the same year the band won Group of the Year.

“One of the most memorable on-stage moments we have had since we started playing together was winning the 2019 Group of the Year award after only being together as a group for 6 months!” said Kailee.

Along with the traditional sounds of fiddle, banjo, bass, and guitar, Taller than You finds a unique style in their music with the addition of the hammered dulcimer and dobro.

Coining their music's sound as 'old-time with a fun twist,' Taller than You takes pride in the fact that they play music that is clean and fun while most kids their age are into mainstream and pop music.

"We hope that people can see through our music that the old paths are sometimes the best paths," said Kailee. "We want to keep our style of music alive. This type of music can draw all ages."

Naming their biggest influences as Becky Buller, Shay Pool, Emily Phillips, and Alison Krauss, they show just how versatile, yet traditional and fun their music's sound is.

For people dedicated to old-time music, Taller than You may seem too bluegrassy, and for the fans who love bluegrass, they may be too old-time like, but they hope that everyone can find something they love in Taller than You's music.

"As long as we are putting smiles on faces and we are having fun, we are happy," said Kailee.

<https://youtu.be/oRdXQVHLLnw>

"Music can change your day, brighten your mood, and put a smile on your face. Our sound is upbeat and joyful. Our favorite thing to do is take a well-known song and all a Taller than You spin to it."

Taller than You, as members of the young bluegrass musician group Tomorrow's Bluegrass Stars, are encouraged most in their music by seeing other young musicians that are keeping old-time and bluegrass music alive.



“We joined TBS to have more music family to enjoy,” said Kailee. “Mr. Colburn has been an encouragement to our group. He keeps up with us and comments to let us know to keep up the good work. He also shared a ton of our events and videos so more people can know about us and who we are.”

The members of Taller than You are constantly pushing each other to become better while still having a blast. They have constantly continued to improve while giving each other the friendly push they needed. They truly have become a family – which is what the bluegrass community is all about.

Taller than You dreams of carrying on the old paths of bluegrass music and keeping it alive. They dream of learning from the pros and, one day, to continue for them.

“We want to honor the Lord in all we do,” said Kailee. “We want our music to be something you can enjoy with our entire family. So many things are targeted just for youth or for seniors. We hope that we can bring them together – even just for a song.”

Find Taller than You on Facebook and Instagram at @tallerthanyouband.