

Get Down on Bluegrass

Get Down Bluegrass

by Kara M. Bachman

For over a decade now, the “boys” of The Get Down Boys have been pleasing audiences with traditional California Bluegrass. Based in the L.A. area, the band has seen its share of lineup changes and has rolled with the punches brought by COVID-19.

According to banjo player Mark Cassidy, however, the band is firing up and getting ready to blaze new trails. Hopefully, they’ll pick up where they left off after winning second place in the Telluride band competition a few years ago, just before COVID-19 caused a semi-hiatus for most in the music biz.

During the lockdowns, where performing live was all but impossible, Cassidy said they spent time writing new material and appearing at the occasional wedding or private party. Their first post-pandemic public gig was in June, and he said the return to the stage – in his hometown of Huntington Beach – was an absolute blast.

“It was really well-received,” Cassidy said, explaining how different – and in this case, rewarding – a public event stage is compared to a private venue. “Everyone was kind of into it and knew the words to the songs...it was just really cool, really rewarding.”

The banjo itself has been quite rewarding for Cassidy. It was an unlikely instrument considering his background, but it has taken him far. Even having any exposure at all to the kind of music he plays today was a stretch back when he was a teenager.

“There’s no banjo around Huntington Beach,” Cassidy

explained.

He first heard a good banjo when his high school substitute teacher talked to him about music. “He totally changed my life.”



“I was a big rap fan,” Cassidy recalled. “That’s where my head was at.”

On the second and last day, the substitute teacher (who Cassidy has not been able to locate again to this day) brought

a bluegrass CD to school and gave it to young Cassidy. A new awareness of the genre resulted in a request his parents thought a bit strange.

“I told my mom and dad I wanted a banjo. They thought I was messing with them,” he reminisced. They got him a banjo as a high school graduation present, and according to Cassidy, “I wound up being really good at it.”

He won first place in a banjo competition there in California and was hooked. Not long after, he moved to Texas with the express purpose of studying under Alan Munde at South Plains College, who he described as a “renowned teacher.”

Cassidy eventually became part of The Get Down Boys, which has already recorded one EP and Cassidy said the band hopes to put out more music soon.

“We want to get something else in the works,” he said, “so we’re hitting the ground running again. We hope to try to hit the studio soon.”

Although the band has seen some lineup changes since it formed in 2009, Cassidy said the other versions of The Get Down Boys often contained members who weren’t “into” bluegrass as their favorite – or primary – musical genre. He said now there is something purer about the current lineup because all three members of the group have been playing bluegrass “for a long time.”



“The Get Down Boys has had different sounds and different iterations,” he said, “but this is my favorite version of the band.”

<https://youtu.be/TZCTQCfk55o>