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by Shelby C. Berry

More than musicians and singers, Chris Shouse, Roddy Puckett, Kati Penn, Aaron Bibelhauser, and Arthur Hancock are artists and storytellers whose signature sound of Kentucky pours through their recently formed bluegrass band, Wolfpen Branch. Created first from the expansion of popular Lexington, Kentucky duo Arthur Hancock and Chris Shouse who started playing together at a Christmas party in 2019, the powerhouse band fully developed when they brought in Aaron Bibelhauser, Kati Penn, and Roddy Puckett.

Their long bluegrass history of Branch combines Arthur and Roddy being founding members of The Wooks, Chris spending time with The 23 String Band, and Katie co-leading the bluegrass band NewTown and being a member of Alan Bibey & Grasstowne.

“With this band [Wolfpen], I feel like I’ve finally started touching on the feeling of playing like I did with The Wooks,” said Arthur. “We’ve all played and shared so much together. We have so much mutual respect, and we created an environment where we create great music with great people.”

Named after a river that runs by a popular festival in eastern Kentucky, Wolfpen Branch started playing together in the summer of 2020 with socially distanced outdoor shows, but they didn’t officially form together until January 2021. Only a month later, they announced their signing with Lexington-based Black Mountain Management.

"I hate to use the word organic, but our band really was formed organically," said Chris.

"The one silver lining of the pandemic is the availability of everyone," said Roddy. "We are close in proximity, so we could safely rehearse together. Coming together was just organic and natural."

Ironically enough, the members of Wolfpen Branch credit the pandemic with their coming together officially as a band.

If not for COVID-19, many of the members of Wolfpen Branch would have been busy with other projects, keeping them from being able to pursue this band as they are now.



“The pandemic allowed us to hit reset. Sometimes when you are playing music, there are times when you are doing more business than music. By getting back to the basics, it allowed us to get back to creating,” said Chris.

With a lot of talent and loads of respect for each other, Wolfpen Branch can focus their time and energy on simply having fun together.

“With the five of us, we have fun, and it’s comfortable. Instrumentally, I love each of their playing, and I have a lot of respect for them. It’s fun to play with people you have fun with and look up to. For me, coming from leading a band where I was singing 98% of the time, it’s fun to all sing now. And our harmony singing is like peanut butter and jelly,” said Chris.

While the band is enjoying having fun playing together, they also have shows planned for the upcoming year. Arthur, in particular, is excited about playing at The Burl in Lexington – the location of his last, bittersweet show with The Wooks.

“That venue has become the place to see live music,” he said.

Wolfpen Branch looks forward to playing shows live, and they boast about energy being the central theme to their live shows.

In addition to these live shows, the band also plans to do a two-week tour out West when the opportunity allows.

“As far as our future plans and goals are, we aren’t out to get famous. We aren’t in it to become wealthy. We want to contribute something to our music that we can share with other people. It all comes back to being organic. We want to follow our music where it naturally takes us,” said Aaron.

Wolfpen Branch has some songs already recorded, with hopes to

finish a full-length record. Each member agrees that recording music is super important to them, and they've set a goal to record a lot of music and constantly be creating.

They even plan to release singles in the coming months.

"We are grateful every time we get to play. We hope to see a return of music in an accessible way," said Arthur.

<https://youtu.be/pXBZjhqYuKA>

Follow Wolfpen Branch and their music journey on wolfpenbranchmusic.com.