

Milo Solujic: Bluegrass Because of the Beatles

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by Shelby C. Berry

Four decades in one career? It's hard to fathom that at this point, but Milo Solujic has almost done that with his bluegrass radio show in Tucson, Arizona.

A radio DJ by profession and musician by heart, Milo spends each day with Arizona's bluegrass and old-time country music lovers on *The Bluegrass Show* on KXCI, showcasing the best bluegrass you can find in the state.

Founded in 1983 on the foundation of connecting communities to each other and the world, KXCI is a community radio station that prides itself on informative, engaging, and creative community-based programming. With more than 35,000 listeners tuning into the station each week over the air and online, KXCI plays music from all genres and eras.

A highly experienced and impeccably talented radio DJ, Milo's radio career launched in 1984 on the same radio station, KXCI, where he's still at the helm. He's interviewed iconic artists like Alison Krauss, Lonesome River Band, and Ralph Stanley – a career highlight Milo will never forget.

"When I was first learning how to play fiddle, I went out and bought every old-time, fiddle, bluegrass record there was. Growing up, I collected and loved a little bit of everything when it comes to music," said Milo.

“One day, I set my alarm to KXCI’s call numbers, and I heard *Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain* in Serbian. I thought I was dreaming, and I knew I would love this radio station. I went down there and got asked to do tech for some of the shows. I also got asked by the morning DJs to bring my records because of my collection. And I’ve been there for 37 years,” said Milo.

As a community-driven radio station, KXCI was the perfect fit for Milo and a career that spans almost four decades. Supported by drives and memberships, this station puts a lot of focus on having something for everyone.

“Now we even have an education program for kids to learn to DJ. We give a whole afternoon to kids, and they do the whole segment with advertising and everything. It teaches speaking skills and other things, and I bet some of these kids end up in broadcasting of some sort,” said Milo.

“Doing this brought me out of my shell. I can talk music all day long in just about any genre. The music changes and comes and goes. It’s real music, the last of real country music. I miss the harmony singing of the bands like Doyle Lawson.”

Bluegrass music drives Milo in a lasting way. “I like the fast stuff! You always want to listen to what makes you feel good.

https://youtu.be/xl_CbuH45gM

Music is good for your mental health and wellbeing. If you can play an instrument for 20 minutes a day for four days a week, you’ll be much better mentally,” said Milo.

In another life, Milo is a musician himself – not that his father didn’t try to prevent that from happening, though. Coming from a family of Serbian ethnic dancers who danced at the New York City World’s Fair in 1964, Milo’s dad, an immigrant from Serbia, thought the idea of playing music was outrageous.

“He said that you pay the gypsies to play music! Then, the Beatles came around. I got a lesson on the guitar, and my dad took it away from me. He said he didn’t want me to be the Beatles! My dad didn’t want me to be a rock and roller, but he wanted me to get an education and a good job. They didn’t come to the US to fool around. My mom was a first-generation American, actually,” said Milo.

He grew up on Romanian music similar to what we know as bluegrass with country themes and bluegrass harmonies. Still, he wasn’t introduced to real bluegrass music until later in life when a friend invited him to a family jam session in his home – fully equipped with upright bass and Bill Monroe songs.

Eventually, Milo was given a violin from a friend after listening to one of The Beatles albums together and encouraged him to learn to play.

“I had played the piano before that, but I fractured my wrist,” said Milo. “I carried the violin around for five years in college in Arizona when I saw a flyer about learning bluegrass and old-time music, and that’s how I learned to play!”





While radio is his central focus, Milo still plays music locally in Arizona. Playing a wide variety of music, including bluegrass, Johnny Cash, Elvis, and Mick Jagger, Milo's band had a regular gig for years at a local venue before Covid. Today, there are only about 10-15 places to place in Tucson.

“Before Covid, it was a very eclectic place to play all sorts of music. I worked for a few record labels in the 1990s here. My whole world was music – playing in my band, working for the record labels, and radio,” Milo said.

Working for the radio and playing his music aren't Milo's only musical world, though. He took over ownership of The Folk Shop in Tucson in 2016, a legendary shop known for its banjos and old musical treasures.

A great local shop with instruments from all over the world and anything you can imagine that is fun, funky, or vintage, Milo bought The Folk Shop from Paul Blumentritt when he retired to keep the place alive as a part of the local community.

“The people that go there play music, and the people that work there play it all. Bluegrass, old-time, Irish, and everything else too! Bob Dylan's band and Robert Plant of Led Zepplin came in this past year. You never know who is going to stop in, even movie stars. It's a great place to stop by,” said Milo.

After such a long and successful career, one simple thing drives Milo to continue in bluegrass radio – the music.

“It doesn't matter if it's blues, bluegrass, or rock and roll. I can talk about it for hours!” said Milo.

As his plans for retirement approach in the next few years, Milo encourages his listeners to do one thing.

“Play or listen to music you enjoy. Keep seeing live music. I encourage people to learn to play music too. Music is the best thing you can get for your mental health.”