

# The Berkeley Institution of Freight & Salvage

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By Kara Martinez Bachman

There are many music venues in the world, but there are few that have the history, vigor, and mission-oriented purpose of Freight & Salvage, which has brought traditional music to Berkeley, Calif. for 53 continuous years.

The venue started as a coffeehouse back in 1968, but in 2009 moved to a larger location, which – according to Director of Marketing and Communications Brian Peebles Kameoka – was “remodeled to our spec, with a state-of-the-art Meyer sound system.”

He said the venue has “maintained a reputation for excellent sound quality and an incredible lineup of musicians, all while maintaining an intimate [450-seat] listening room.”

Although the venue had to shutter itself this past year due to COVID-19 restrictions, they’re all excited to get back into the fray. If the past is any indication of what’s to come, audiences are in for a treat. When Peebles Kameoka says the roster of past performers is “incredible,” well...anyone with any sense would have to agree. From Ricky Skaggs to fiddler Laurie Lewis, the list of recognizable names is long. There are also talented acts that are just building a name, and he specifically mentioned the young group from the Bay area, Crying Uncle.

“We love them,” Peebles Kameoka said. “They did a streaming

porch concert to benefit The Freight shortly after the shutdown last year. You may not have heard of them, but you will!”

Laurie Lewis is a special case, as her involvement at the unique, nonprofit venue space goes beyond just appearing there. Peebles Kameoka called her “a living legend” and said, “we’re blessed to have her living locally.” He said Lewis curates the annual on-site Bluegrass Festival in conjunction with the venue’s program director. She also does an annual show there on the Saturday following Thanksgiving.

“Bill Evans performs regularly, and like Laurie’s show, his annual California Banjo Extravaganza event went online [for 2021] – both the show and the mini-camp – and was incredibly successful,” Peebles Kameoka said.

*“Ricky Skaggs is among the many big names we’ve had at The Freight, and we had a sold-out show with him two days before closing down. I remember that because the pandemic was dominating the news at that time, but California hadn’t closed yet, and we were all monitoring what would happen.”*

At press, the reopening date for the venue wasn’t etched in stone, but much depends upon the decisions of local lawmakers due to an unpredictable year. Peebles Kameoka said they are shooting for a reopening in late summer or early fall.

<https://youtu.be/zfhI0BoWuvA>

*“The governor of California has cleared the way for reopening on June 15, however, we still have to follow county and city health guidelines which are likely to be determined in the next month or two,” he said. “Everyone at The Freight is excited to have a reopening on the horizon, but at the same time there is still a lot of work to do before we’re ready for that.”*

In the meantime, they'll continue offering online content, as they have for the past year, including when they streamed their annual Bluegrass Festival featuring artists that had originally been scheduled to perform in person, including Laurie Lewis, Alice Gerrard, Michael Daves, Tatiana Hargreaves, and Peter Rowan, all of whom streamed a set from their own homes.

Since then, Freight & Salvage has presented over 50 streaming concerts, including a transition to filming them at the venue itself, but minus the live audience.

"The streaming concerts are never going to be the same as being there," Peebles Kameoka said, "but we made a commitment to figure out how to make it happen because it was putting musicians back to work. For our longtime supporters, it's a really great sign of hope to tune in and see music being played in

our room again." He also mentioned the education programs, "led by Director of Education PC Muñoz," he added. We teach all kinds of classes to the general public, but also in local schools, and those switched over to take place online and have flourished. It's been a bright spot during the pandemic, and we'll come out of it with a lot of people picking up a new instrument during this time."

This outreach is part of the nonprofit's mission, aimed at promoting public awareness and understanding of traditional music of various genres.

In addition to the streaming shows, on June 4 the venue will do a scaled-down, online version of its wildly popular Freight Fest. Peebles Kameoka said bluegrass fans will want to tune in for The High Water Line, one of the bands confirmed to perform at this event.

When it's all said and done, it sounds as if Freight & Salvage is beloved because of respect for the performers. Peebles

Kameoka said the venue “puts the music and the musicians first,” and many of them consider it “home.”

“There are some cool generational things happening too,” he added. “We have staff now who grew up around this place because their parents were musicians and very involved. A co-worker told me that as a kid, she used to sleep in her parent’s guitar case backstage during gigs. The Freight is that kind of place.”



Bela Fleck and Abigail Washburn – photo by Irene Young



Laurie Lewis and The Right Hands: photo by Dave Weiland