

# Twisted Pine

## Twisted Pine

by Susan Marquez

Twisted Pine began organically as a group of (mostly) students from the Berklee College of Music in Boston who enjoyed getting together to listen to and play bluegrass music.

*“There is an active bluegrass scene in Boston,” says Dan Bui, who plays mandolin in the group. “When I was in college, there were great players from around the country studying at Berklee, as well as a big bluegrass network in the northeast. Lots of festivals, and lots of older bluegrass enthusiasts who love to listen to live music.”*

Dan says that a group of students and other musicians played together constantly. “We went to shows and festivals, and did lots of informal gigs, playing at farmers markets, bars and even a few weddings. Out of that came Twisted Pine.”

As they formalized their band, the group started a regular gig at the Cantab Lounge in Cambridge. “They have a bluegrass jam every Tuesday night,” explains Dan. “It’s something they’ve done every week for over 20 years. There are bands upstairs and lots of jamming downstairs. Playing there each week helped us build our repertoire and setlist. It is a great place. I think every scene needs a place like that.”

The name Twisted Pine grew (pun intended!) from a need to have a name for the band. “One of the early band members was from California,” recalls Dan. “I think she came up with that because of a kind of pine tree that grows there. I am not really sure of that, but in any case, the name stuck!” That was back in 2013 when the band began playing together. “We’ve

had different members come and go,” says Dan, who is an original member of the band.

The band today is comprised of Bui, Chris Sartori (bass), Kathleen Parks (violin/vocals), and the newest member of the group, Anh Phung (flute/vocals). “We’ve known Anh for a long time,” says Bui. “She’s a great musician and we connect with her both musically and personally.” While the flute may not be an obvious instrument on Americana music, Bui says that Anh is more about the person and her personality than her instrument. “She is such a fan of traditional bluegrass. She plays fiddle tunes on the flute, and she also plays mandolin. Everywhere she plays she turns heads.”

While they may have started out as a straightforward bluegrass act, they soon discovered that it felt more natural for them to write songs that related to their own experiences and musical identity outside of bluegrass. “We decided to just go with that,” says Bui, “because it wouldn’t be authentic if we wrote like Bill Monroe or other iconic bluegrass musicians.”

The band recorded a seven-song EP of covers, *Dream*, based in bluegrass, but with a more poppy sound, followed by a self-titled CD, *Twisted Pine*.



Bui says as they kept writing more and more, and traveled together, their sound developed in a way that no one in the band could have foreseen. The group has been busily evolving into what the *Boston Globe* now calls “something else, a wider version of a string band; boundary jumpers akin to outfits like the Punch Brothers, Nickel Creek, and Crooked Still.”

Their newest CD, *Right Now*, is due to be released August 14.

The album’s first single, *Don’t Come Over Tonight* is a sort of bluegrass indie folk-and-funk concoction that perfectly portrays the band’s musical evolution. Next up is Amadeus Party. “I came up with the initial idea,” says Bui. “I wrote it on the mandolin and brought it to the band to become what it is today.” The song began as an instrumental that Bui describes as “bluegrass band does James Brown funk” and ends with the refrain “Amadeus Party.”



*"We all like the movie Amadeus," says Bui, "and when we were rehearsing, Kathleen just started randomly singing 'Amadeus Party' and we liked it! We knew we wanted a video in the studio while we were recording the song, and thought it would be funny to wear period costumes. We didn't realize how much those elaborate costumes would cost to rent, but in the end, it was worth it. The video really captures the spirit of how we feel when playing music together. We really just enjoy having fun and vibing off each other."*



Because of the COVID19 quarantine, the band hasn't had the opportunity to see each other in person since mid-March. "We had a request for live-stream and we tried to figure out how to do that. We decided to do a variety show-type format that would pay tribute to our locations." The band members used phones and whatever equipment they had, sending videos to each other.

"The more we did, the more excited we became," says Bui.

"For a solid month we mixed audio and worked on a video. It was really a great way to quarantine. We just thought about how we could use the internet and technology to promote, stay relevant and figure out what we could do."

Releasing a new album without a promotional tour is a challenge. "We try to utilize the internet as much as we can and find other ways to reach people during these unprecedented times."

