

# Wintergrass ...Pocketgrass

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by Susan Marquez

*“Wintergrass couldn’t put the entire festival in a box, so they put it in a pocket. Right here, one you can wear, right on your heart. You can put a stamp in it. You can put a map in it. You can even put a few pearls of wisdom in it. This is how it works: Please send us your recipes, you know—food, stuff you really like, and we’ll pick one of those recipes and it will become the theme of Pocketgrass. Because, you know, we all eat, and we all listen to music – at least, if you are listening to Pocketgrass you do! So, settle back, we’re gonna have a great time! Hope you’ve got your food in front of you. We’re gonna have music. We’re gonna have music that comes from the archives of Wintergrass. There’ll be a story, and Cousin Harlyn’s coming too! You have the best seat in the house, so stay tuned. It’s all coming on Pocketgrass!”*

–“AuntMama”

The introduction to a video series on YouTube lets viewers know right off the bat that the variety show called *Pocketgrass* will be welcoming, folksy, and fun. Born during the Covid pandemic, the show was the solution the board and staff of Wintergrass Music Festival came up with to keep artists and fans connected. “Wintergrass 2020 ended the last weekend of February, and the pandemic was announced in mid-March,” recalls Wendy Tyner, who serves as the director of philanthropy and publicity for Wintergrass. “The board and staff had to make a difficult decision early on to cancel Wintergrass 2021.”

Wintergrass Music Festival began in 1994. "Anywhere from 12,000 to 14,000 people attend each year," says Wendy. "We are working on the 2022 festival now, exploring all the ways we can present it."

Tickets for the next year's festival typically go on sale a few days after the festival ends. The early ticket buyers are incentivized with being the only ones to get rooms at the Hyatt where the festival is held. "We had to refund all the money from ticket sales, which was tough," says Patrice O'Neill, who serves as executive director of Wintergrass. "We use that money to operate on during the year." Patrice is the only remaining founder of the Wintergrass Music Festival, and her primary role is artistic director, which includes booking all the talent, as well as staging the event. "I'm fortunate that I'm surrounded by smart and wonderful people."

The challenge, after canceling the festival for 2021, was to keep people engaged, connected, and excited about Wintergrass. Patrice pulled together a task force of staff members and the Board of Directors of Wintergrass. "We decided not to lay low. We are a non-profit and we had a mission to fulfill." The task force watched concerts online to see what worked and what didn't. "We figured we could make a little bit of money if we did our own online show."

The decision was made to do a variety-type show called *Pocketgrass* because it could be viewed on a mobile phone that would fit in a pocket. The host is a fictional character, AuntMama, played by Maryanne Moorman of Windy Gap, West Virginia, near Roanoke. Her homespun demeanor is delightfully inviting to viewers, who know immediately they simply need to settle in and enjoy the show. AuntMama's sidekick is a mysterious banjo-playing character named Harlyn. "We have kept Harlyn's identity a secret," laughs Wendy. A new episode is produced each month.

There are usually one or two bands on the show, as well as an

archival video of past performances at Wintergrass. Food, as is mentioned in the show's intro, is a central theme, with recipes submitted by viewers as well as the artists. The first episode went live on September 11, 2020. "We had a fairly good reserve fund, so we are officially funded to do shows through June," Patrice says.

[https://youtu.be/zabKAglEu\\_g](https://youtu.be/zabKAglEu_g)

The April episode, set to drop on April 8, will feature barbeque with musical entertainment by husband-and-wife bluegrass duo Kenny and Amanda Smith. "We try to have national, international as well as regional talent on the show," says Wendy.

The show is produced in Patrice's husband's professional recording studio, David Lange Studios. "My husband has been a recording engineer for over 40 years." The studio is located at the couple's home in Edgewood, Washington. "All of the bands have come to us," Patrice says. "We've had to buy some new equipment – we do a four-camera shoot." Seven shows have been produced so far. The June show will feature the Wintergrass Youth Orchestra along with Martha Redbone and the Seattle Pacific University Orchestra.





Who is ...Cousin Harlyn???

June's episode will be the last, for now. "We will take a break for the summer, then see what happens next," says Patrice.

Episodes of Pocketgrass can be found on YouTube: (40) Pocketgrass – YouTube. Donations can be made online to support the ongoing efforts of the Wintergrass Music Festival: Acoustic Sound Goes Monthly! ([givingfuel.com](http://givingfuel.com))