



Joe Dobbs

August 15, 1934 - September 21, 2015

Joe Dobbs – the beloved fiddler who came to Appalachia nearly 50 years ago and introduced its music to people around the world – died September 21, 2015, just five weeks after his 81st birthday. His love for the region was pronounced. “I wasn't born in West Virginia,” he liked to say, “but I got here as soon as I could.”

Born near Greenville, Mississippi, on Aug. 15, 1934, son of Walter and Lillie (Berry) Dobbs, Joe spent his first three decades working various jobs, from the oil rigs off Louisiana's Gulf Coast to Old West shows in Colorado to radio stations from New Mexico to Tennessee. Along the way, he and his wife Amy reared six children: Dale, Diane, Susie, Jani, David, and Scott.

Music defined Joe's life. Whenever he played “Billy in the Low Ground,” he remembered when he was 5 years old hearing his grandfather play the same tune. Thirty-five years later, in 1976, Joe and his brother Dennis created the popular music store Fret 'n Fiddle on Huntington's West 14th Street, later moving to Heritage Village in downtown Huntington before relocating to its permanent home at 809 Pennsylvania Ave. in St. Albans. At each location, the store became a musicians' oasis, its Saturday jam sessions becoming legendary. Friendships made at those jams engendered many a band, including Joe's own groups.

With Dennis and Mary Faith Rhoads, for instance, Joe formed a trio that would carry the U.S. State Department's musical diplomacy to Africa and beyond in the mid-1970s. Later, Joe formed other acclaimed ensembles with Margaret Ray and Bill Hoke, and with fiddler Jenny Allinder, a group in which Joe switched from fiddle to mandolin. He also loved performing in duets with guitarists like Robin Kessinger, Jesse Smith, Ritch Collins, Chris Sutton and Randy Brown, or with dear old friends like singers Sallie Sublett and Michelle Lewis and dear new friends like innovative young percussionist Lee Hines. And of course, people were always awed whenever Joe played twin fiddle with Buddy Griffin or Bobby Taylor or Cathy Grant.

Joe's longest-running musical relationship was with The 1937 Flood, the band he co-founded in 1973 with Dave Peyton and Charlie Bowen, soon afterwards to be joined by Roger Samples and Stewart Schneider. More than 40 years later, Joe still was performing with The Flood. And it was Joe who even named the band in a moment of on-stage inspiration. While stepping up to play its first gig in Carter Country, Kentucky, the group realized it hadn't decided what to call itself, so Joe walked to the mike and said, "They call us 'The 1937 Flood,' because back in Huntington they're still talking about us!" It stuck.

When not making music, Joe traveled. Sometimes it was on organized tours, like the Alaskan cruise he and Margaret Ray took a few summers ago, but more often the trips were impulsive, solo adventures such as his motorcycle journeys to the Pacific Coast and back on his cream-colored Honda Gold Wing.

Meanwhile, many people knew Joe mainly as a friendly voice in the dark. For 20 years he was the host of the popular Friday night "Music from the Mountains" show on West Virginia Public Radio. With his late producer/engineer George Walker, Joe recorded live studio performances,

always leaving time for the musicians to spend part of the hour telling their own stories. His weekly guests ranged from venerated music legends to promising newcomers he met at events like the annual Vandalia Gathering that he frequently hosted at the state capitol.

Whether with a band or as a soloist, Joe took the music to every corner of the community. On any given day, he might play for an afternoon at a nursing home, hospital or school classroom, then that night move on to the Governor's Mansion to fiddle for visiting exchange students. Or he might spend an evening playing fiddle during the scenes of the Mary Draper Ingles drama written and performed by his longtime friend Edwina Ziegler. Just a year ago, Joe was among those invited to play at Congressman Ken Hechler's 100th birthday party. A week later, he was playing his fiddle on stage every night for a week as part of the cast of the Marshall University Theater production of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

A year or so before that, you would have found him on a book tour with *The Flood* to introduce his 2011 autobiography, "A Country Fiddler," published by Mid-Atlantic Highlands. It is that book that sums up Joe's joy with his music. "I don't think that I will live long enough to play the violin as well as I would like," he wrote on the last page, but "I am so lucky to be living my dream and still learning to play my fiddle."

Joe was preceded in death by his father, Joe Walter Dobbs Sr, his mother, Lillie Lucille Dobbs, his brother, Dwayne Eugene Dobbs, and his sister, Lucille Vivian Davis.

He is survived by a large and loving family, including his son and daughter-in-law Dale and Cheryl Dobbs; his daughter and son-in-law Diane and Harold Johnson, their son, Andy Dobbs, and their grandchildren, Leslie and Nate Dobbs and Alden Amick; his daughter and son-in-law Susie and A.J. Napier and their children, Amy, Albert and Eli Napier, and their granddaughter,

Jasmine Tabor; his daughter and son-in-law Jani and Tony Dobbs-Chauncey, their son, Jeffrey Dobbs, and their grandchildren, Noah Treadwell and Benjamin Ryx; his son and daughter-in-law David and Theresa Jorgensen Dobbs and their children, Aidin Jorgensen and Scott and Autumn Dobbs; and his son and daughter-in-law Scott and Connie Dobbs and their children, Ryan and Lindsay Dobbs. Joe also is survived by his brother, Dennis Dobbs, of Austin, Texas, his wife Barbara, and their two children, Christopher and Candice.

A sharing of stories by family and friends will begin at 7:00pm Friday September 25, 2015 at Bartlett-Chapman Funeral Home, St. Albans.

Visitation will be at 5:00pm until service time Friday at the funeral home.

You may share sympathies and stories with the family at www.chapmanfuneralhomes.com

Bartlett-Chapman Funeral Home, family-owned and located at 409 Sixth Avenue, St. Albans is honored to serve the Dobbs family.

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP **25**. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Bartlett-Chapman Funeral Home
409 Sixth Avenue
St. Albans, WV 25177
(304) 727-4325
info@chapmanfuneralhomes.com
<http://www.chapmanfuneralhomes.com>

Sharing of Family and Friends

SEP **25**. 7:00 PM (ET)

Bartlett-Chapman Funeral Home
409 Sixth Avenue
St. Albans, WV 25177
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info@chapmanfuneralhomes.com
<http://www.chapmanfuneralhomes.com>

Tribute Wall



“ *Joe Dobbs*

October 06, 2023 at 08:41 AM



“ *1 file added to the album New Album Name*



Sonny Montgomery - July 13, 2016 at 09:19 PM

SM

“ Sonny Montgomery, Denton, TX.

I just yesterday, June 29, 2016, found out that my friend and fellow musician, Joe Dobbs, passed into the Father's hands almost a year ago. I had been sending Joe emails...most of them forwarded stuff about music etc, but had not heard from him in quite a while. I was concerned because of all the flooding in WV, so called the store....FretnFiddle in St. Albans. The person (man) answering my phone call told me about Joe....broke my heart!!

I first met Joe in Ruston, Louisiana in 1952, where we played in the Tech Southernaires band...a group of 6 with Joe on fiddle...myself playing steel guitar. We actually used La. Tech recording studios under the blessing of the Speech professor, Mr. Bundy, and recorded a 15 minute program which was aired on the local Ruston, LA radio every Saturday morning. I will try to upload a picture from the Monroe, La Daily News-digest...it is pretty grainy and a little yellow with age, but you can see Joe...he had a "flat top" haircut and was holding the fiddle up high!!

I also dug out my 1953 LA. Tech Lagniappe....found a snap shot of the group, and Joe was playing upright bass, as the bass player and pianist were singing a duet for a student body gathering in Howard Auditorium...we were entertaining the whole campus!!

We used to have a gathering each spring and again in fall, of the group. As we grew older, we cut it to once yearly....then every other year, then finally I believe the last one was held with me being the host, and we used the Denton County Cowboy Church building to play music and have a "picnic" lunch, prepared by the ladies of the group. I think also that Dennis was present and played with these old "geezers". I did have Dennis's phone and address, but lost it. Know now he lives near Austin.

I'm sending our love and condolences from the Tech Southernaires to Joe's family, who we never did get to meet. We're so sorry we didn't know sooner. Is there some memorial we could have a part in???.....there are only 3 of us left, myself, Phil Misenheimer, and Jerry Edmondson. If any of the family would like to touch base with

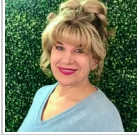
me, my cell# is 940-368-1580 and I reside at 1117 Ellison Park Circle, Denton, TX 76205.

Sonny Montgomery - June 30, 2016 at 02:52 PM

WF

“*Condolences to the Dobbs family. Our thoughts and prayers go out to your whole family. Psalms 147:3 says Jehovah God, "heals the broken hearted, and binds up their wounds." May God bring you comfort and peace.*

Williams Family - October 01, 2015 at 08:43 AM



“ I want to share my memories of Joe Dobbs. He's one of those people you never forget and that you wish you had spent more time with. So wise, so kind, so passionate about his music and the West Virginia way of life.

Back in the late 70s my Dad got a job at Marshall University and our family moved from Tucson, Arizona to Ironton. As you can imagine, we experienced quite a difference in climate, landscape and culture! To get to know the area and people better we'd take excursions around the region on the weekends. I'll never forget when Dad took me and my two sisters (all of us were grade school aged) to the Fret 'n Fiddle at Heritage Station in Huntington. It was a wonderland of instruments and music, and there at the center of it all was this tall man with a bushy beard and sparkling eyes - Joe Dobbs. He pulled out his fiddle and played for us - it was silky and smooth and beautiful. I had never heard anything like it before. We were immediately hooked on Appalachian music. Joe spent some time with us that afternoon and soon we broke out in song in three part harmony for him (we all sang in the church choir). He pulled a guitar down from the wall and handed it to me (I'd taught myself a few cords). I strummed and he played fiddle and we all sang.

Well, that was the beginning of a special friendship. Dad was so inspired by Joe's fiddle that he started learning how to play. My sisters and I got better at guitar and started writing songs. It wasn't long before we were hanging out and jamming with Joe and other musicians at the Fred 'n Fiddle fairly regularly. That led to Joe inviting us to record a session for his Public Radio show, "Music from the Mountains." It was magical!

Joe was so kind to a young family of outsiders who were new to the area. He showed us how warm and generous the people of West Virginia are and how talented. He made a big impression on us. Over the years Joe moved his shop to Saint Albans, we grew up and we lost touch. Dad stayed in contact fairly well, and he told Joe about playing the violin with the Marshall Symphony and starting up

a Celtic band. Joe was his mentor. And when I think about it, he was an ambassador of good will, representing the fine qualities of the Mountaineers to our family that was trying to grow roots in a new region.

I will always remember him with great warmth and affection. He was a great man and he will be missed.

*With sympathy,
Julie Brown Terry*

Julie Brown Terry - September 28, 2015 at 09:49 PM

BB

“ Good-bye, Joe

I took my father-in-law's old violin to the Fret 'n Fiddle shop in west Huntington to get it ready to play after it had been in a closet for about 25 years. That was in 1977-78. On that and subsequent visits to the shop, Joe changed the way I thought about playing music. For example, he handed me a bow with a price tag of \$150 and said to try it on my instrument. I said that if I damaged it I couldn't afford to pay for it. Joe snorted and said, "Don't worry. This is a repair shop." When I asked him how to properly hold the bow, he said, "Hold it any way you like. Just use it to get some music from the strings." Another time I had just heard a fiddler play very well and commented that I was never going to be that good a player. Joe returned with the comment, "Bruce, music is not a competition." Through the Saturday jams at the downtown Huntington shop I met and learned from Kenny Baker and other great local musicians.

As my family grew, Joe helped equip my daughters with guitars. When the girls wrote and performed some of their own songs, Joe recorded them and said he would play them on his radio show. In St. Albans, Joe sold me my first viola, which I learned to play in the Marshall Symphony Orchestra.

We last saw Joe at his book signing at Ashland's Paramount Arts Center, where I had first heard him perform in concert many years before.

Joe was such an important person in my personal and musical life. I carry his legacy with me every day.

*Bruce Brown, fiddler
Kelley's Bridge Celtic and traditional band*

Bruce Brown - September 28, 2015 at 08:28 PM

DS

“ I met Joe when I was 12 years old. Joe had just moved to St. Albans from Huntington and was at the first St. Albans location of Fret & Fiddle. My dad is an electrical contractor and he was doing a job at the Bank of St. Albans across the street from the store. One day I was with my dad while he was checking on something at the bank and I saw the music store. I had to go check it out, and while dad was conducting business I ran across the street and went in the store. Joe was sitting in a rocking chair playing an old fiddle. He asked if he could help me and I asked if he had any Gretsch guitars. He didn't, however, he said if he ever gets one he would call me. I gave him my phone number and about that time my dad walked in the store. We look around and talked with Joe for a while and then left very impressed by his fiddle playing.

I had no idea that a long time friendship was born. About a week later, Joe called me and said, he had found a Gretsch Nashville and asked if you I was still interested. We went to look at the guitar and my dad bought it for me. I was learning to play Chet Atkins style and had to have any guitar with Chet's name on it. Well, to make a very long story short, from that day on, I have probably bought over 100 guitars from Joe, I developed a true friendship, we have ridden motorcycles together, we have recorded together, I have been a guest on "Music From the Mountains" several time, Joe and I have made several trips to Nashville together. Joe once said I was the youngest pilot he had ever flown with. I am a pilot and I always rented a plane and flew us to Nashville when we went.

I have had a long friendship with Joe, and I have a huge hole in my heart now that he is gone, I will miss him terribly. I moved to Cincinnati about 10 years ago to work for the FAA, since then we have not seen each other much. We have kept in touch on Facebook. My life is better by having Joe Dobbs in it, and I thank God for that day, as a 12 year old, I ran across the street to see the new music store in town. I love you Joe...RIP

David Simmons - September 25, 2015 at 07:27 PM

BN

“ *Bill, Tammi, Megan and Zech (butter bean) Narehood purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Joe Dobbs.*



Bill, Tammi, Megan and Zech (butter bean) Narehood -
September 25, 2015 at 06:41 PM

OF

“ To the family of my friend Joe Dobbs...it's hard to believe that forty some years has passed since I walked through the door of the old Fret & Fiddle on 14th Street West in Huntington. Joe and I became friends on that first meeting and remain so even today. Many good times were had there and at the festivals we attended. Joe, Dennis and myself traveled to many festivals in the old Chevrolet van Joe had back then...not much money but great times. Joe was a patient teacher. One time we were at the small park in front of where Dennis and Barb lived and I was trying to learn the banjo break for "Jerusalem Ridge," Joe had the fiddle part pat, Dennis had the guitar pat, and they worked with me a couple hours letting me feel my way getting as close as I could on the banjo break....that is the kind of folks the Dobbs family are good helpful people. Joe had the best bow arm I ever saw a fiddle player have. Once we were at a festival down in Grayson, back when Joe still smoked cigarettes, it was after dark and Joe put his lit cigarette between his ring finger and little finger on his bow hand and while he played we were treated to a red light show in time with the tune he was playing; it seemed the lit cigarette end was keeping perfect time with the tune. There are so many good memories that I have and many more folks have too of Joe Dobbs and his years here in West Virginia. Joe was a man of character who brought a lot of joy to folks with his fiddle and his wit and his knowledge of music. He will be missed by many because he brought happiness to so many of us while passing through on his way to a place where fiddle players never die. I love you all Dobbs Family...Ozzie Finley

Ozzie Finley - September 25, 2015 at 03:35 PM

DC

“*RIP Joe Dobbs. I just heard the news and I have to say that I'm super bummed. He might not have ever remembered my name but he always referred to me as "young man", even at 36 years old, which always brought a smile to the corner of my mouth. The last time I seen him back in the spring, he was in his rocking chair on the stoop, plucking at a mandolin. I asked him if he minded if I got an old 50's Gibson archtop down from the top shelf to play it and he said "young man, you play anything in this store that you want to play and you don't have to ask!" Lol. Growing up and especially in my later years it was always an exuberant feeling to open the door at Fret N Fiddle and instantly hear Joe playing over top of an small orchestra of martins and mandolins. I might not have appreciated it as much when I was younger but I grew into it and soon realized that he was one of those guys whose playing could/would give you chill bumps. His fiddle took him all over the world, but he would be the first to tell you that he always enjoyed returning home, to the hills of WV. He was truly a gifted player and honestly about as nice of a person as anyone could ever ask to ever know. His personality was so warm that he became fast friends with just about everyone he ever met. He will be forever remembered and missed by the community and by me.*

Keep on playing Joe.

Don Crum - September 25, 2015 at 03:03 PM

LW

“ I was newly separated from my husband when I moved to Saint Albans; on my own for the first time in my life. What a blessing to have Joe for a neighbor. He watched over me and introduced me to his family and friends. I felt like I was a part of his extended family. He always extended an invite to me when friends would gather for music sessions and fellowship. I'll surely miss him and his watch care. I think to myself, 'God's kingdom is surely made of this!' Linda Walker of Saint Albans

Linda Walker - September 25, 2015 at 02:28 PM

AP

“ Saw Joe several times in Charleston when we attended the gathering. Always enjoy his great music. God bless. Him and his family. Marilyn and Al from Buffalo, NY

Al Pautler - September 24, 2015 at 11:55 AM

AC

“ Joe was a wonderful family friend and taught my dad to play the fiddle soon after they met 40 years ago. He even essentially pushed my dad on stage to play guitar with Joe on fiddle at a large festival, scaring Dad half to death. In 2011, Joe came over to my house in KY and recorded a fiddle part on my song "Maiden City Waltz," which was a great thrill. I am so pleased to have that recording and memory of him on my album. He was a great musician and a cherished friend. He will be greatly missed. The Cole Family in KY sends our deepest sympathies to the Dobbsses. -Alson Cole III

Alson Cole - September 23, 2015 at 03:19 PM

SB

“ We are not familiar with Joe's family and children but my husband, Sid Berry, is Joe's 1st cousin. Sid's Father Arthur and Joe's mother Lillie were brother and sister. Sid and I both want to extend our sympathy to the family. It really has made Sid think that now he is the oldest Grandchild alive of Grandma and Grandpa Berry's grandchildren. Joe was the oldest. We are truly sorry for such a great loss to your family. We have enjoyed reading all the history that has been written about his life and we have his book that he wrote. He made sure that we got it. Love you all Sid and Lois Berry Sebring Florida

Sidney C. Berry - September 23, 2015 at 09:29 AM

PW

“ *Scott and Family*

So very sorry for your loss. Please know you are in mine and Barry's thoughts and prayers during this difficult time.

Pam, Barry and Barry Williams

Pam Williams - September 23, 2015 at 08:49 AM

LO

“ *Love from Bonny of Columbus, Ohio purchased the Sentimental Dreams for the family of Joe Dobbs.*



Love from Bonny of Columbus, Ohio - September 22, 2015 at 09:37 PM