



# DESERT BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION

Newsletter



## Grass Clippings

Volume 27 Issue 1

April — May 2021



### DBA—Going Live!

*By Dave Polston, DBA President*

Hello, Pickers & Grinners! Sorry for the delay in getting the newsletter out to you. (My fault!) I wanted to wait until we finished up with the mini campout we just had. Because we didn't have our festival this year, a small group decided to get together and go down to Lake Patagonia to do a little pickin'. About 10 pickers set up camp on Sunday and gathered for an evening jam. On Monday we had a few day trippers come down and pick with us. We had a morning, afternoon, and evening jam! (My fingers still hurt). At each jam, we had many spectators stop by and enjoy the music. Tuesday brought another couple of jams. Everyone who attended had a great time and we all heard and learned some new songs. Some of us had kayaks or boats and enjoyed time on the water also. Didn't catch any fish though. I want to thank Dale Vickroy for coordinating this. She is also coordinating our 3rd annual October campout. It will be the first weekend in October. She still has some spots available. Send her an email if you are interested in attending.

In other news, finally some good stuff: workshops are back live! Monday night has been doing zoom and will continue for those who are uncomfortable about attending live, but we also will be holding a live group at the church. The church is allowing us to hold workshops there until July. However, they just remodeled and are not going to allow outside groups to use the facilities any more. So we need to find another place to hold the workshop come September. **If any of you have connections with a church or civic group that can facilitate us, please talk to them and let us know. (See Carole's article on page 5 for more info on what we need).**

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 3*

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\*DBA Members Free, Space Permitting

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## DBA—Going Live! *continued*

There is a new link for the Monday zoom on the calendar. This Monday, April 5th, will be a zoom-only Monday, as the church is closed for Easter Monday. The Tuesday night Marana workshop will start up again on Tuesday, April 6th. For both workshops, we will have social distancing and encourage mask wearing when moving around.

We are looking at opening up jams again. Udall will begin immediately as it is outdoors. We are contacting Thirsty's, Pinnacle Peak, and the VA about getting those going again. See page 9 for a few more details, and also keep an eye on the calendar for those announcements. Looking forward to getting those jams going again.

At our last board meeting, we approved having the festival in March, 2022. We will start planning that soon and, as always, if anyone has experience in grant writing, we could use it. The more money we can raise through grants and sponsors, the better a festival we can have.

Well, it's nice to be finally writing some positive news about things coming back to normal. So grab your instruments and join us at the workshop or jams. It's time to pick again!!!!

**NEEDED: An experienced grant-writer to help support our DBA-sponsored Bluegrass Festival.**

Our festival will be held in about a year: March, 2022, to be exact,

We raise money all year to host the Marana Bluegrass Festival, and this year, that fund-raising has become especially critical to allow the festival to become self-sustaining. We will no longer have funding from Marana.

If you have experience in grant-writing, especially for music, the arts, and/or non-profits, please contact DBA President Dave Polston at [davepolston@yahoo.com](mailto:davepolston@yahoo.com)



### *Welcome to Our New & Returning Members*

<b>John Blake</b>	Green Valley
<b>Dickie Fisher</b>	Tucson
<b>Rachel Hilgeford</b>	Tucson
<b>Ross Nichols</b>	Safford
<b>James Reams</b>	Litchfield Park
<b>Arlene Tomlinson</b>	Tucson



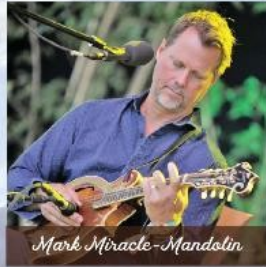
Sheila McCormick - Bass



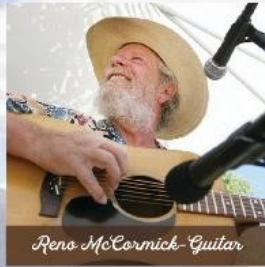
Chris Brashear - Fiddle



Matt Rolland - Fiddle



Mark Miracle - Mandolin



Reno McCormick - Guitar



KC Graves - Mandolin



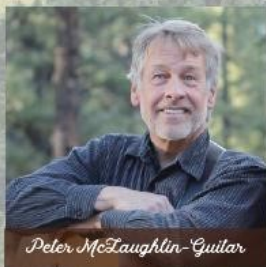
Alvin Blaine - Banjo



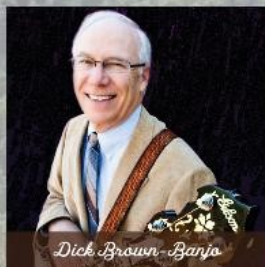
Bekah Rolland - Singing



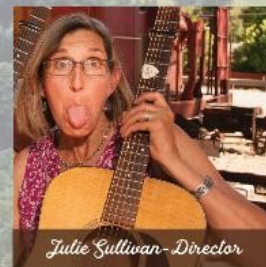
Minke Shiner - Bass



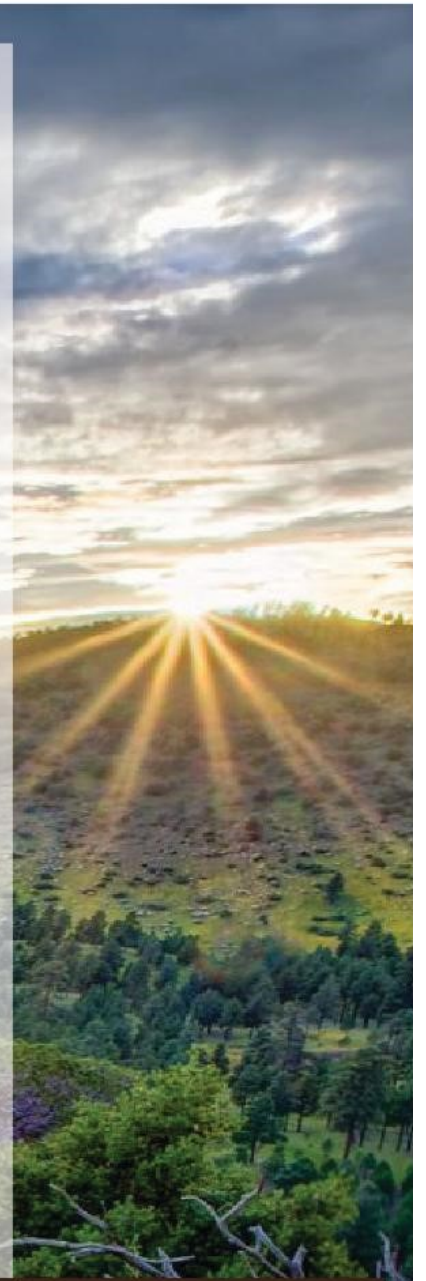
Peter McLaughlin - Guitar



Dick Brown - Banjo



Julie Sullivan - Director



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# Monday Night Workshop Needs Your Help!

Monday workshop, on the east side, has enjoyed the use of Christ Community Church Oasis room for at least 10 years at no cost.

Although we have occasionally made donations to the church, they have not asked us for any money.

This has allowed us space to hold a workshop and several breakout sessions, instrument breakouts and multiple events.

The church recently re-created that area into a beautiful concert area electronically equipped for programs and events.

The church will be using that area differently and they have decided to discontinue all outside groups currently using the area.

In short, we will have access to the facility at Christ Community **only through July 2021**. After that we must find another venue for the Monday workshop. ~~ Carole



dbamondayworkshop@gmail.com

**520-760-0993**



## **Monday Workshop needs everyone's help to locate the perfect new venue for our workshop**

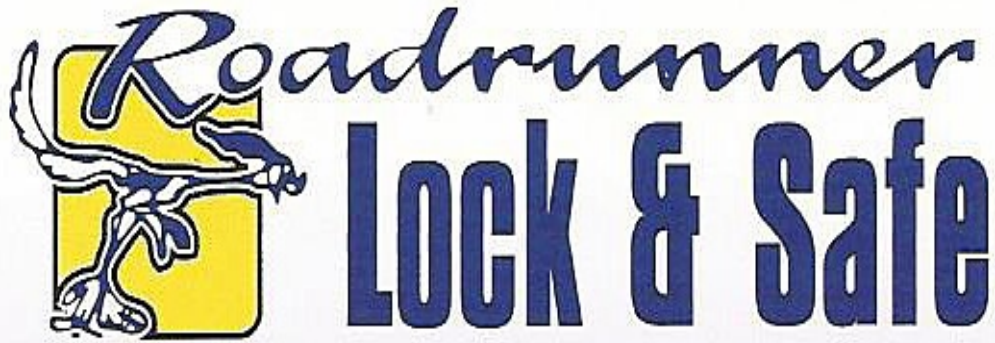
Ideally we would like a large main room for the workshop and areas for 2 or 3 breakout jam groups. Storage is also helpful. We will have to adjust to the best that we can find.

It's important that we search now, so that by summer, we know what our plan will be. If a great location is found, we can actually move anytime, not wait until after July.

The pandemic is making this more challenging, since things are not yet open. Udall Center is closed for Covid testing, and our members are just beginning to start to play together again.

If you are a member of an east-side organization, warehouse, empty store, etc., with facilities that might meet our needs, we would like you to check the area out and let us know. We understand we may have to pay rent, and we will have to figure out how to cover that, too.

**Please share your ideas ~ Thank you!**



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## FIDDLER'S CORNER

# Origins of the Banjo\*

By Suzette Sommerer

One of the defining characteristics of bluegrass music is its distinctive acoustic instrumentation. The early five-piece bluegrass bands were typically made up of mandolin, guitar, banjo, bass, and fiddle, each with its own intriguing history.

All are descendants of the spike lute of Ancient Mesopotamia (now areas of modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Turkey, and Syria) around four thousand years ago. The spike lute is a string instrument with a distinct neck that passes through the body. It was brought to Ancient Egypt around 1600 BC by nomadic Semitic tribes from Canaan (now Israel and Palestine), eventually arriving in West Africa in the 9<sup>th</sup> century via trade with Muslim Berbers crossing the Sahara.

There are more than 80 West African plucked spike lutes (plucked rather than bowed), similar to the Mesopotamian lutes in that the body is made from a gourd, calabash, or carved wood covered like a drum with animal hide; the neck is a plain, round wooden stick without frets; and the strings are attached to the neck with leather or cloth strips tied as rings that slide to tune. It is likely that several of these designs were brought to the New World by enslaved people, who made their own versions from local materials.

Early gourd banjos with many similarities to the African instruments appeared in the Caribbean during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes incorporating European-inspired elements such as tuning pegs. The Creole Bania is the oldest known banjo from the American continent, made of calabash (a gourd-like tree fruit), sheepskin, wooden neck, and four iron strings (three long, one short). There's a fascinating video of Rhiannon Giddens playing one of the oldest known Afro-Caribbean music transcriptions from Jamaica in the early 1700s, at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, in front of the Creole Bania.\*\*



Creole Bania, collected ~1770, Dutch colony of Suriname, now in Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam

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\* Much of the material for this article is drawn from the scholarly work, *Banjo Roots and Branches*, edited by Robert B. Winans, 2018. It is widely quoted on various websites dedicated to the history of the banjo, and is highly recommended for the serious banjo nerd.

\*\* <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=436944783665196>

## FIDDLER'S CORNER, *continued*



Jatta playing the akonting, Courtesy Chuck Levy

A striking similarity between the African instruments and early American banjos can be found in the playing technique. Laemouahuma Daniel Jatta, a member of the Jola people of Gambia, saw a modern banjo played clawhammer style on a TV program while studying in the U.S. in 1974. In an NPR interview, Jatta said, "I watched the program and saw the modern banjo being used. And the sound just sounded like my father's akonting." The akonting is played with the index finger striking down on one of the

long strings, and the thumb sounding the short string as the hand moves back upward. This is almost identical to the style described in early American banjo instruction books from the mid-1800s, similar to what is now known as clawhammer or frailing. There's a great video of Jatta playing the akonting on Chuck Levy's YouTube channel. \*\*\*

Other Caribbean instruments such as the Jamaican strum strump and the Haitian banza and the banjo shown in *The Old Plantation*, the earliest known American painting with a banjo, have three key features that distinguish them from the African instruments: flat, fretless fingerboards; wooden friction tuning pegs, and the neck attachment to the gourd body.

By the 1840s, European American banjo makers were mass-producing banjos, typically wood-rimmed rather than gourd. These banjos became popular with white Americans through traveling minstrel shows.

Innovation continued, with metal parts, exotic woods, raised metal frets, and a tone ring that improved the sound. By the early 1900s, both four- and five-string models played with a plectrum were being played in ragtime and jazz; by the 1940s, Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys had firmly established the banjo as an essential bluegrass instrument. Fiber strings were eventually replaced with steel, to allow the instruments to be heard over brass and reeds in dance halls, leading to that irrepressible twang we all know and love today.



The Old Plantation, ca. 1785-1795, attributed to John Rose, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Williamsburg, VA

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\*\*\*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzt0v9roU6g>





## Udall Jam Start-up!

**The Udall Jam is starting up!!** DATE: April 5, Easter Sunday TIME: 2:00 pm

The group usually meets at the ramada by the entrance, but also may meet in the amphitheater area behind a wall across the road into the park. This is just inside the entrance off Tanque Verde Road or somewhere around there.

This jam is “no host.” That means just come and play, if you want. No one is in charge . . . . If the group gets larger than 8 or 10, you can divide into two groups; there's plenty of room.

Udall Jam will continue every **first** and **third** Sunday. NOTE: Starting in May, we'll change to summer hours and will start at 7:00 pm. Jams are scheduled to last up to about two hours.

We be jammin', come on out and play!



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## More Workshop Updates!

**MONDAYS:** On the day after Easter, April 5, there is no workshop at the church. There will be a Zoom workshop, however. There will be a new link for the zoom workshop which will be sent to you by then. By April 12th, on most Mondays there will be both Zoom and Church workshops. This will continue most weeks into the summer. The church is at 530 S. Pantano Rd., Tucson, AZ, and the Zoom link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82262953430?pwd=WDkxSVQ3eHFOQmtPWUJDWWIxckxBZz09>

You may bring water to drink, but the carpet is new, so no stains allowed! Also, there are no music stands, so bring your own, if you want one.

There are 2 available rooms for breakout groups. After the breakout, groups will come back into the main room at the end (by 8:00 pm) and perform something.

**TUESDAYS:** Starting April 6, the Marana Tuesday night workshop will be starting up at the Ora Mae Harn District Park, 13250 N. Lon Adams, Rd, Marana, AZ. Contact Jim Wagner 520-407-6572 for more info.

**START TIMES, etc.:** Both workshops start at 6:30 pm. **Please wear a mask, especially when walking around.** NOTE: masks are optional for Zoom workshops! :)



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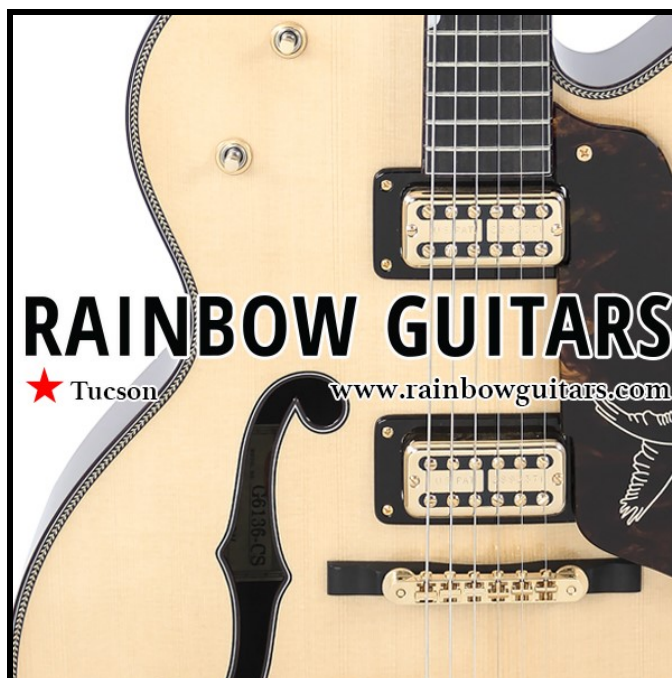
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### Way Out West

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[www.bluebhikku.com/WayOutWest.htm](http://www.bluebhikku.com/WayOutWest.htm)



# DBA Calendar

2021 APRIL						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

*Where's the calendar??*

[Click here to look online!!](#)

*That nasty virus* is still going around BUT **there is light at the end of the tunnel!!** The DBA Udall jam is starting up, as is the Monday workshop. See the announcements in this issue, and check the DBA website [calendar](#) for the latest info.

And in the mean time, wash your hands, think about coming out to a workshop or jam, and mostly—keep pickin'!

2021 MAY						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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~ Announcement from Bill Evans ~

*Featuring Tony Trischka, Alan Munde,  
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**April 24,  
2021**



**April 25,  
2021**

What a year it's been! We hope that each of you along with your loved ones, have managed to stay well through these many months and are finding ways to stay connected with friends, family and music.

Like many events scheduled for the first half of this upcoming year, we are going online and this year's camp will run for 1 1/2 days of instruction all day Saturday, April 24th and a half-day on Sunday, April 25th.

We'll have multiple workshop sessions from Tony Trischka, Alan Munde, Riley Baugus and myself. And there's even more good news: Kristin Scott Benson will be joining us as well.

So please reserve April 24 and 25 to be with us for the New Mexico Banjo Camp online!

<https://www.nmbanjocamp.com/>

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**Novice/beginner mandolin player** looking for 2-3 other s-l-o-w players (who play any bluegrass instrument) to work with on songs. I am a very slow player (think 50-60 BPM). I'm not ready for the workshops yet, but would like to work on getting ready. I can offer safe space outside, or inside with windows open and AC on when it's hot. Contact me at [cathy\\_2545@yahoo.com](mailto:cathy_2545@yahoo.com) if you might be interested in trying out occasional or regular get-togethers.



## GREAT WEBSITES

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### Peter McLaughlin

Flatpick & bluegrass guitar: Beginner  
& advanced 520-247-1027

### Dave Polston

Banjo, guitar, and dobro lessons  
520-245-6126

### Mike Purdy

Guitar, mandolin, and banjo  
520-977-9780

### Marc Rennard

Fiddle, mandolin, and guitar  
314-313-0318  
cramdranner@yahoo.com  
Expert repairs – Violin, Viola, Cello,  
Bass, Fretted Instruments  
Bow Repair



Learn to play and come to the DBA workshops  
& jams! (See more info in this issue!)





## JAMS & OPEN MICS

The DBA-sponsored Udall Jam is starting up — see the details earlier in this issue. Other DBA jams will be listed on the calendar at [www.desertbluegrass.org](http://www.desertbluegrass.org) if/when they start up.

Below is the previous list of other, related jams.

Check local contacts for current and future scheduling.

### Southern AZ Old Time Fiddlers Association

Unitarian Universalist Church  
4831 E 22nd St, Tucson  
Tuesday 6:30—8:30pm  
Info: Wilbur 520-743-7086

### ORCA Bluegrass Jam

700 E Kingston St, Tucson  
\$2.00/per person  
First Wed. of the month  
September through April  
(except Holidays), 7-9pm  
Info: Shay Cardell 520-357-6432  
sierra1@desertsky.us

### Casa Grande Airport Jam

1st & 3rd Saturday, 12:00 pm.  
Casa Grande Municipal Airport, 3225 N Lear Ave. Casa Grande Az. Acoustic stringed instruments only, NO Amps, Bluegrass songs preferred. Contact Steve Hartwell [steve@arizonabluegrass.com](mailto:steve@arizonabluegrass.com)



**CHICAGO  
MUSIC STORE**

Your acoustic guitar Headquarters!

**Downtown Tucson:**  
45 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave  
Tucson, AZ 85701  
520-622-3341



**Midtown Tucson:**  
5646 E. Speedway  
Tucson, AZ 85712  
520-886-1516

**Instrument repairs, Lessons, Sheet music**





## ASSOCIATIONS

### Arizona Bluegrass Association

1831 W. Cloud Place  
Phoenix, AZ 85086  
Mark Jurich, Chairman  
markj@arizonabluegrass.com  
218-390-7342  
[www.arizonabluegrass.com](http://www.arizonabluegrass.com)

### International Bluegrass Music Association

4206 Gallatin Pk.  
Nashville, TN 37216  
Phone 615-256-3222 | Toll Free 1-888-438-4262  
Email [info@ibma.org](mailto:info@ibma.org) | [www.ibma.org](http://www.ibma.org)

### Hall of Fame Bluegrass Music & Museum

311 West Second St.  
Owensboro, KY 42301  
270-926-7891  
888-MY BANJO (toll-free)

### Arizona Old Time Fiddlers Association

[www.arizonaoldtimefiddlers.org/index.html](http://www.arizonaoldtimefiddlers.org/index.html)

### Arizona Old Time Fiddlers Association, Southern Arizona Chapter

3020 W. Avenida Cresta  
Tucson, AZ 85745  
Info: Wilbur 520-743-7086

### Southwest Old Time String Band Association

[wotgathering.com/](http://wotgathering.com/)

### Tucson Friends of Traditional Music

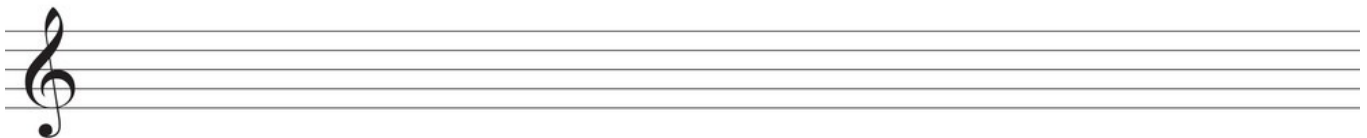
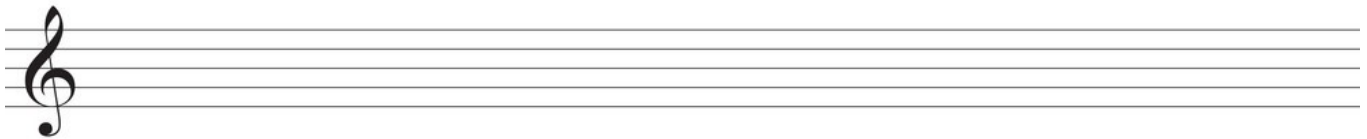
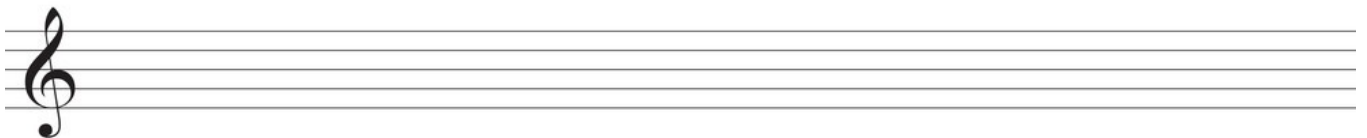
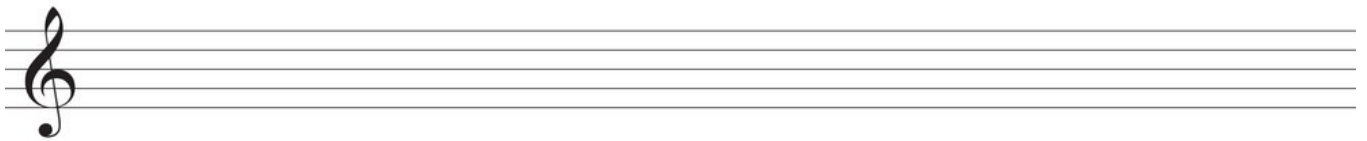
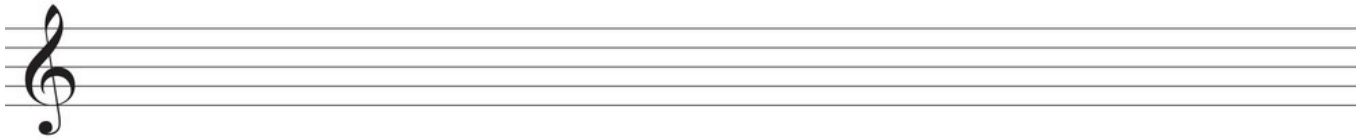
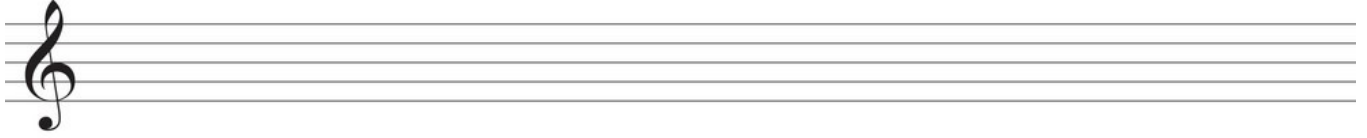
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[tucsoncontradancers.org/](http://tucsoncontradancers.org/)

### Tucson Kitchen Musicians Association

[www.tucsonfolkfest.org/](http://www.tucsonfolkfest.org/)  
[www.facebook.com/TucsonFolkFest/](http://www.facebook.com/TucsonFolkFest/)



# *Your Notes Here*



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[www.DesertBluegrass.org](http://www.DesertBluegrass.org)

MEMBER OF THE DESERT BLUEGRASS ASSOCIATION

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM

Membership dues for the Desert Bluegrass Association are \$20 annually per family and are due March 1<sup>st</sup>. Members joining after September 1 of any year will have their memberships extended through the next year. Those joining before September 1 must renew the following March 1<sup>st</sup>.

FIRST NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ CELL PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to be included in the Membership Directory? (Check one)     YES     NO

What instruments do you play?     BANJO     BASS     FIDDLE     GUITAR     MANDOLIN

RESONATOR GUITAR     OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form then mail it, along with your personal check or money order payable to Desert Bluegrass Association to:

Mike Headrick (DBA Membership Secretary)  
13308 E Placita el Algodon  
Tucson, AZ 85749